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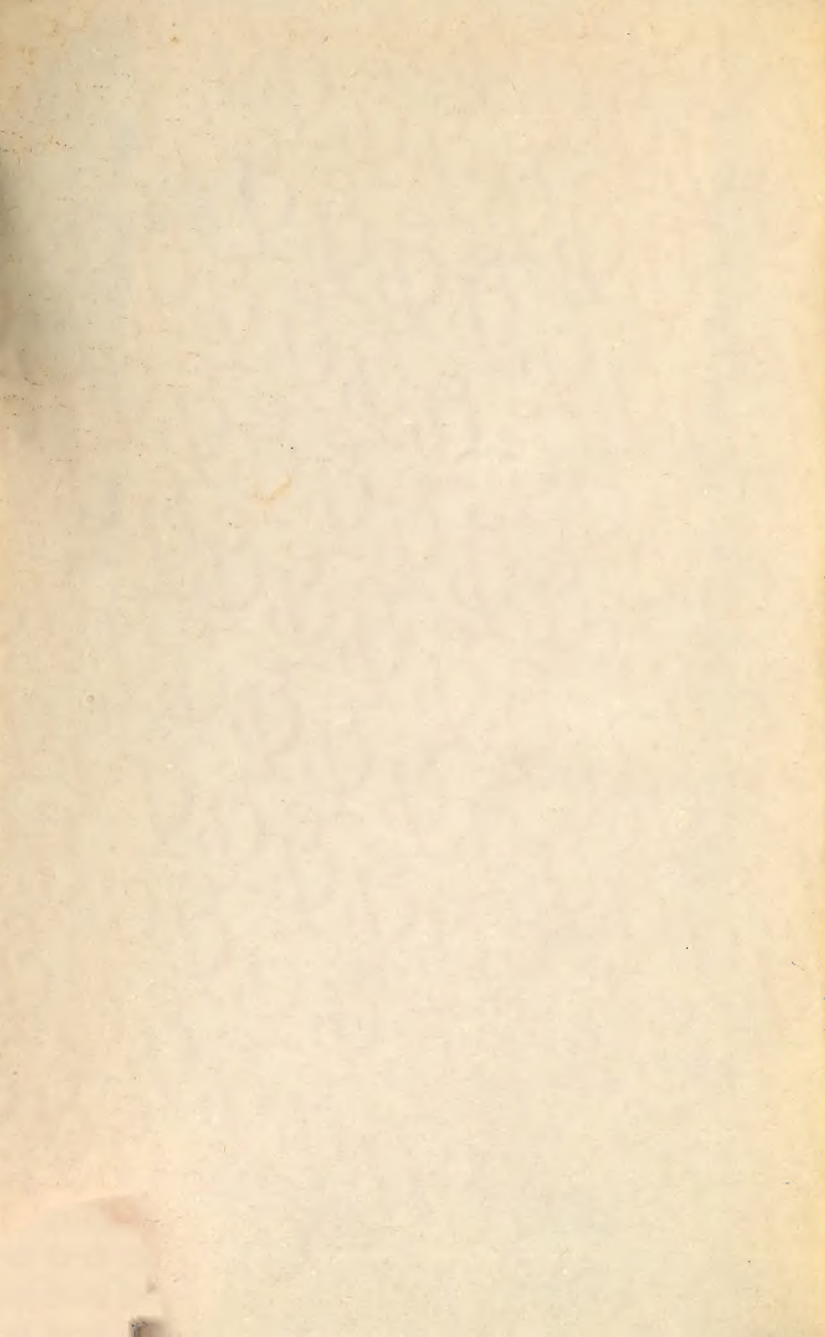
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Everyman, I will go with thee, and be thy guide,
In thy most need to go by thy side

AESCHYLUS was born at Eleusis in 525 B.C.
Fought at Marathon and Salamis. Won the
tragic prize for the first time in 484. He paid
two visits to the court of Hieron I at Syracuse,
and died at Gela, in Sicily, 456 B.C.

AESCHYLUS: PLAYS

TRANSLATED BY
G. M. COOKSON

INTRODUCTION BY
JOHN WARRINGTON



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INTRODUCTION

THE richest legacy which a sublime poetic genius can inherit from the past is a varied store of legendary tradition in the shape of ballads or popular epos; his greatest present blessing is to live in an age wherein his utterance finds echo in men's hearts, stirred by the memory of immortal deeds and the aspiration towards yet nobler achievement. Both these advantages were enjoyed by the father of Greek tragedy. According to Athenaeus,¹ Aeschylus 'was wont to say that his dramas were but slices cut from the great banquet of Homeric dainties'; while from the battle-grounds of Marathon and Salamis there sprang the tree of liberty and self-dependence whose fruits we recognize in all that is meant by 'western culture.'

Aeschylus, son of Euphorion, a member of the old Athenian aristocracy, was born in 525 B.C. at Eleusis,² the home of mysteries whose annual celebration may have influenced to some extent the profundity of his religious thought and the grandeur of his style. We have it upon the authority of Suidas that in 499, the same year in which Sardes was burned by the Ionians, Aeschylus first competed for the tragic prize; but it was not until 484, according to the Parian Marble, that he was successful. It is not known which plays he exhibited on this occasion, but he was victorious no less than twelve times between 484 and 458. Meanwhile, in 490, about which time the *Suppliants* was produced, he and his brother Cynaegirus were present at Marathon. They must have distinguished themselves in this first decisive battle of the world, for they appeared among the groups of warriors depicted by Polygnotus in the Stoa Poicile. Ten years later the poet fought at Salamis, where a second brother, Ameinias, led the Greek vanguard into action.

About 476³ he was entertained by the celebrated patron of literature, Hieron of Syracuse, who in that year founded the new city of Aetna on the site of Catana; and to mark this event, Aeschylus wrote and exhibited a play entitled *The Women of*

¹ *Deipnosophistae*, VIII.

² See K. Korouniotes, *Eleusis* (Eng. trans.), 1936.

³ Diogenes Laërtius, *Bibliotheca Historica*, xi, 49.

Aetna. In 472 he again won the tragic prize with a trilogy of which the *Persae* formed one act, and soon afterwards paid a second visit to the court of Hieron. Two other trilogies which included the *Seven Against Thebes* and *Prometheus Bound* were exhibited in 467 and c. 460 respectively; but the crowning event in Aeschylus' career as a dramatist was the production of the *Oresteia* ('Agamemnon,' 'Choephoroi,' 'Eumenides') in 458. It is not improbable that his aristocratic outlook, which is manifest in the concluding play of this stupendous masterpiece, made life under the new democracy distasteful; at all events, Aeschylus left Athens for the last time not long afterwards, and died at Gela in 456 B.C. The following epitaph, which may have been written by himself, was engraved upon his tomb: 'Beneath this stone lies Aeschylus, son of Euphorion the Athenian, who perished in the wheat-bearing land of Gela: of his noble prowess the grove of Marathon can speak, or the long-haired Persians who knew it well.' Still more lavish was the tribute of his countrymen; for it was decreed at Athens¹ that 'whosoever desired to exhibit a play of Aeschylus should receive a chorus,' i.e. be officially allowed to produce the play at the Dionysia, although the author could no longer compete—an honour without precedent in the history of that festival.

One other episode in the life of Aeschylus deserves our notice. According to Aristotle,² he was once charged before the Court of Areopagus with having 'revealed the secrets of Demeter' (i.e. of the Eleusinian mysteries) on the stage. The details of this dramatic story, of which there seems no good reason to doubt the truth, are given by a twelfth-century author, Eustratius, quoting from a lost work of Heraclides Ponticus. Aeschylus' acquittal, it seems, was due not so much to his assurance that he had acted in ignorance as to his distinguished conduct on the field of Marathon.

A word must now be said about Greek tragedy, of which Aeschylus is recognized as the founder; about his contribution to its development; and about his qualities as poet and playwright. The etymological meaning of the word 'tragedy' (τραγῳδία) is 'goat-song,' originally a chant accompanying the ritual slaughter of a goat, which was both sacred to and representative of the nature-god Dionysus. This choral lyric, or

¹ The decree is clearly referred to in Aristophanes' *Archonians* (v. 10), 425 B.C.

² *Eth. Nic.* III. i. Cf. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, II. 14.

dithyramb, from which Greek drama is said by Aristotle to have arisen,¹ was, in its earliest form, extemporized; according to Herodotus² it was first sung by a regularly trained chorus under the direction of Arion of Methymna (seventh century B.C.). Diogenes Laërtius, writing in the second century B.C., tells us that 'in the oldest times the chorus³ alone went through the dramatic exhibition (διεδραμάτιζεν) in tragedy. Afterwards Thespis [fl. 535 B.C.], to give rest to the chorus, added one actor distinct from the singers; then Aeschylus added a second, and Sophocles a third, which completed the development of tragedy.'⁴ Besides the introduction of a second actor, whereby he created dialogue properly so-called, Aeschylus is said by Athenaeus to have paid particular attention to the dance. He also introduced buskins (*kothurnoi*), which heightened the player's stature, and masks (*prosôpa*), which not only added to the solemnity of the scene but were so designed as to magnify the speaker's voice.⁵ Both these innovations were of considerable advantage in the enormous unroofed theatre.

It was usual for dramatists to present their tragedies in the form of a trilogy (three plays which, though complete in themselves, generally had a continuous theme) followed by a satyric piece in lighter vein. Two facts should be carefully noted in this connection. (1) Aristotle lays down the doctrine that the main object of tragic composition is to excite pity and terror;⁶ but this does not imply that a trilogy must end unfortunately. That of *Prometheus* almost certainly did not; while the *Oresteia* is evidently constructed on the principle of leading the audience through scenes of 'pity and terror' to a goal of peace and reconciliation. (2) Each of the first four plays in this volume represents as it were only the libretto of one act from an opera-ballet; and even in the case of the *Oresteia*, which is the single extant

¹ *Poetics*, IV. For a full discussion of the origins of Greek drama, into which space forbids us to enter here, see A. W. Pickard-Cambridge, *Dithyramb, Tragedy, and Comedy*, 1927.

² I. 23.

³ The original number of the chorus was fifty (e.g. in the *Suppliants*). Aeschylus is also mentioned as having employed twelve, a number which was increased by Sophocles to fifteen and became standard. K. O. Muller in his edition of the *Eumenides* (1833) suggested with some probability that so long as the exhibition of tetralogies (three tragedies and a satyric play) lasted, the dramatist obtained a chorus of fifty from the public authorities and divided it among the different pieces.

⁴ *Vitae Philosophorum*, III. 34. Cf. Aristotle, *Poetics*, IV. 13.

⁵ Philostratus, *Vit. Soph.* I. 9; *Vit. Apoll.* VIII.

⁶ *Poetics*, XIII.

specimen of a trilogy,¹ we lack the musical accompaniment and sweeping gestures of the choral hymns and dances.²

At Athens the custom was to produce new plays at the Great Dionysia, the annual spring festival held in honour of Dionysus. Each competitor exhibited a tetralogy, and the order of their merit was decided by a panel of judges. The nucleus of a Greek theatre in the time of Aeschylus was the orchestra (lit. 'dancing-ground'). In the centre of this circular space stood the *thymele* or altar of Dionysus, around which the orchestra performed. The auditorium, shaped like an extended semicircle, was usually cut into a hillside. Stone seating was arranged in concentric tiers; and the seats of honour in the lowest tier were divided from those above by a gangway from which other stepped gangways radiated. Beyond the orchestra was a shed (*skene*) which served as a dressing room.³ It was fitted with doors through which the actors entered or retired, and which could be opened to reveal an interior scene such as that of Clytemnestra standing over the bodies of Agamemnon and Cassandra. Finally, between the *skene* and the orchestra were two passages (*parodoi*). They corresponded to the 'wings' of a modern theatre, and were used by the chorus.

Before the appearance of Aeschylus there were dramatists like Choerilus, Phrynicus, and Pratinas who had begun to raise the general tone of tragic writing. The son of Euphorion, however, gave it decisive impulse by his unprecedented depth of moral speculation no less than by the stately splendour of his language. The religious aspect of the drama had always been prominent; but in the hands of Aeschylus that quality took on a more profound significance. His central theme, particularly evident in the trilogy, is the abiding sadness of man's lot. Sin has an inherent tendency to propagate itself, and thereby incurs the repeated vengeance of the gods, which is all the more fearful if delayed. There are passages of the *Oresteia* wherein Aeschylus 'almost approaches a stern and sombre monotheism'; but even Zeus himself is but the instrument of an overriding law.

Among those who are celebrated by Virgil as walking with Orpheus and Musaeus in Elysium—*Quique pii vates et Phoebo digna locuti*—the author of the *Eumenides* deserves first place.

¹ The satyric play *Proteus* is lost.

² Aeschylus is known to have written about ninety plays, of which only seven have survived.

³ From it developed a more elaborate *stage*, which had become a raised structure, as early as the fourth century B.C.

His genius is nowhere better shown than when he depicts the gradual approach of fear, as in the *Persae*, or the immediate horror of impending fate, as in Cassandra's raving. His handling of the chorus in *Prometheus*, and those sublime lyrics telling of Iphigenia's death in *Agamemnon* reveal him as a master of contrast; while the *Seven Against Thebes*, to name but one example, displays in all its majesty the range, vigour, and imaginativeness of his poetic diction.

JOHN WARRINGTON.

1955.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

THE text of Aeschylus' surviving plays rests chiefly on the Medicean MS. (M.) at Florence. It dates from the eleventh century and includes the scholia and arguments, together with an important *Life* of the poet and a catalogue of his works. This MS. is defective to the extent of lacking some pages of the *Agamemnon*, which are supplied, however, from other MSS. numbering about eight and dating from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century.

The first printed edition of the Plays is that of Aldus Manutius (1518). It followed MS. M. That of Victorius (1557) included the missing *Agamemnon* passages. The best complete edition available to English students is that of Gilbert Murray (Oxford Classical Texts, 1937), who has also translated the separate plays (1929-30).

Besides those works mentioned in footnotes to the Introduction, see H. Weir-Smyth: *Aeschylean Tragedy*, 1924; G. Thomson: *Aeschylus and Athens*, 1941; F. R. Earp: *Style of Aeschylus*, 1948; E. T. Owen: *The Harmony of Aeschylus*, 1953.

Notes on separate plays and the trilogy are printed immediately before the text of each.



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THE SUPPLIANTS

(circa 490 B.C.)

NOTES

THE PLAY. This is the first part of a trilogy of which the second and third were entitled *The Egyptians* and *The Danaids* respectively. It shows Attic drama evolving from mere lyric pageant. Interest centres mainly on the chorus; character and plot are rudimentary; and the play deals with a single situation.

THE LEGEND. Danaus, son of Belus, had fifty daughters, and his twin brother Aegyptus fifty sons who desired their cousins in marriage. Danaus at first objected to this proposal and fled with his daughters to Argos. Here, after some hesitation on the part of King Pelasgus (or Gelanor), and a stern threat uttered by the herald of Aegyptus, they were given asylum. At this point *The Suppliants* ends. Aegyptus and his sons arrived in due course to press their suit. This time Danaus complied with their request; but to each of his daughters he gave a dagger with which they were to kill their husbands on the bridal night. All the sons of Aegyptus were thus murdered, except Lynceus who was spared by Hypermestra; and he afterwards avenged his brothers by killing Danaus.

CHARACTERS

DANAUS

PELASGUS, *king of Argos*, and ATTENDANTS

HERALD

CHORUS OF DANAIDS *with attendant maids*

SCENE: *Argos. A hill in the foreground, on the summit of which stand altars and statues of many gods.*

THE SUPPLIANTS

CHORUS, *entering in procession.*

Zeus, the Suppliant's God, be gracious to us,
Pitifully behold us, for fugitives are we;
Where the blown sand-dunes silt the mouths of Nilus,
There we took the highway of the blue, salt sea;
There looked our last at the land of Zeus, her borders
Lapsed and lost in the Syrian marches wild,
Fleeing, not as outlaws banned for blood-guilt
Lest a people perish, but self-exiled.
No way but this to escape abhorred embraces,
Marriage rites unholy that true love shuns; 10
Better far lands and unfamiliar faces
Than wedded and bedded with King Aegyptus' sons.
As when hard pressed on the board a cautious player
This piece or that from a threatened square withdraws,
One move seemed best unto Danaus our father,
Counsel-in-chief and leader of our cause;
One woe to suffer—and that the noblest sorrow
Seeing we were compassed in on every hand,—
Tarrying not, with the fleeting ocean billow
To fly till our keel touched the Argive strand, 20
Whence we boast ourselves sprung, from the breath of Zeus'
nostrils,
And the touch of his procreant finger laid,
For a dynasty's founding, on a king's daughter,
Even the gnat-tormented heifer-maid.
What land but this would offer us a haven,
Where else the world o'er should we welcome find,
Having no arms but the suppliant's feeble weapons,
Boughs from the woodland plucked with white wool twined?
Realm, broad realm, brown land and sparkling water,
Gods of the sky and holy ones of earth, 30
Denizens of darkness that visit men with vengeance,
And in that Triad last named but chief in worth,

Zeus, the Protector of travel-weary pilgrims,
 Keeper of the threshold never crossed by crime,
 Send soft airs to greet our maiden meinie,
 Winds of welcome blowing from a sweet, calm clime.
 But the ungodly sons of King Aegyptus,
 Bulls of the herd, ere they trample this fair ground,—
 Loamy levels, tilth and fallow land and pasture,—
 Far over ocean with their swift ship hound! 40
 There let them meet with thunder-blast and lightning,
 Wrath of leaping seas and spite of storm-swept rain;
 There let destruction find them when rough winter
 Looses the lash of the loud hurricane;
 Ere they climb loth beds to make of us their minions,
 Minions of their pleasure and playthings of their pride;
 So kindred blood shall not serve to cool brute passion
 Not by sweet exchange of hearts sanctified.

[The CHORUS forms a rectangle about the altar.]

CHORAL HYMN

Youngling divine, I hail thee now,
 From beyond the sea thine aid I invoke; 50
 Son flower-fed of the Mother Cow,
 Quick with Zeus' breath and his handstroke.
 So of the dam with hoof and horn
 And enchanted body a babe was born,
 Man-child made for mortal lot,
 Epaphus, the touch-begot.

The naming of thee where long ago
 Our Mother roamed this pastoral earth,
 And the calling to mind of a vanished woe
 Shall bear witness in trials of later birth; 60
 And more sorrow yet may come into ken,
 Though we know not how and we guess not when,
 Like ours of to-day and hers of old;
 And these at long last shall Time unfold.

To one that watcheth the wild birds winging,
 Here at ease in his native bower,
 The suppliant song of an alien race

Chance-heard, shall seem as the sweet, sad singing
Of Tereus' Daulian paramour,
The nightingale hidden, the hawk in chase. 70

Spring and summer for sorrow she grieveth
Under the green leaves weeping her pain
And the life that was passed in homelessness:
Spring and summer the story she weaveth
Of the child she bore by her own hand slain,
And the wrath of a mother pitiless.

I as the nightingale passioning for sorrow
To Ionian music tune my pipe,
And these soft cheeks feel the rain-worn furrow
That on Nilus' bank grew round and ripe: 80
For my heart hath learnt the meaning of tears,
And I fill my lap with blossoms pale
Gathered with grief in the wood of wail,
The better to hush these brooding fears
That are fain to know to what end I fare
From the land that lies dim in dust-veiled air,
If there be any who hearkens or hears.

Nay, but ye Gods of the bride-bed and begetting,
Hear me! Ye should be jealous for the Right!
Grudge lawless youth, with the hot blood fretting, 90
Lore that perfects passion's neophyte!
Set the brand of your scorn on lust that profanes,
And mingle love's rite with austerities sweet!
What is fiercer than war? Yet for war-weary feet
There standeth an altar, no sacrilege stains:
To what-so wight would from battle-carnage flee,
A refuge awe owns and a court of deity,
Where red-handed Havoc halts and refrains.

Saith the wise saw of old,
'The purpose Zeus doth hold 100
Next to his heart no hunter brings to bay.'
All Being in his sight
Flows in the main of light,
The mirrored glory of his perfect day,
Where man the babbler with vain lips
Sees but the secular dark of unrelieved eclipse.

The thing that he hath wrought
With brow-nod of calm thought
Fallen, stands fast, and, grappled, is not thrown.
His counsels tread the maze 110
Of labyrinthine ways
Through quicks, through glooms with umbrage overgrown;
And in that covert dark and shy
Bold riders check the rein, foiled is the keenest cry.

From towered bastions
Of Hope he plucks Time's sons
And tosses them to ruin. If one brace
The mettle weariless
Of Gods for his duress,
Pride pays with penal pangs, though throned in the holy
place. 120

So let him mark afresh
How froward is this flesh
How the polled trunk for lust of me doth grow
With many a stubborn shoot;
How pricks to mad pursuit
The unremitting goad, a curse, a cheat, a woe.

So to music impassioned,
Sung high, sung low,
With tears I have fashioned
Untuneable woe. 130

Alack! 'tis like mourner's grieving.
So sadly my quick spirit graces
With groanings of death griefs that live,
And I cry unto Apia's high places
My broken speech to forgive,
And falling down on my linen veil
I mar with rents its fabric frail,
Tissue of Sidon's weaving.

With amplest oblation
To high heaven we come, 140
For hope's consummation,
When death's wind is dumb;

But alack! for the woes dark-heaving,
The billow whose path none traces,
Nor what strand on its crest I shall reach!
I cry unto Apia's high places
To forgive my broken speech,
And falling oft on my linen veil
I rend and mar its fabric frail,
Tissue of Sidon's weaving.

150

Thus far the oar right well hath sped;
And the bark flax-sewn to fend salt seas,
With never a flaw in the following breeze
Nor winter storm to dread,
Hath constant been as my prayers and vows:
And I pray the Father that all doth scan,
Here on firm earth, that he may send
To well-begun a happy end;
So I, that seed am of his spouse
August, may flee the embrace of man
And live unlorded and unwed.

160

Zeus' daughter, vowed to maidenhead,
Look with a loving eye on me,
That would keep chaste and pure as she,
Whose virgin arm the arrow sped
And slew the Hunter in his lust
Whom Opis tremblingly outran!
O maid unwon, a maiden grace
With all thy power in this sore chase,
That I, the seed of Zeus' spouse august,
May flee the violence of man
And live unlorded and unwed.

170

But, if these will not, then I will essay
The sun-loathed courts of Death,
Where never a sick soul is turned away
That wearies of this breath;
And, since Olympian Gods no help afford,
My corpse shall access find to Zeus, Earth's Lord,
When suppliant boughs shall be decked with the knotted
cord.

Ah! Mother Io, thee wroth Gods amerce: 180
 And of the courts celestial I know
 That there dwell jealous wives who hate and curse;
 For waves run high when breezes stiffly blow.

Then Right and Wrong shall be unreconciled;
 And Justice shall upbraid
 Zeus, that he honoured not the heifer's child,
 Whom once of old he made,
 If that at this late hour of time his eye
 Be turned back when his own offspring cry: 189
 Yet, when we call, he hears—he hears though throned on high.

Ah! Mother Io, thee wroth Gods amerce:
 And of the courts celestial I know
 That there dwell jealous wives who hate and curse!
 For waves run high when breezes stiffly blow.

[During the preceding chorus DANAUS has climbed to the top of the hill.]

DANAUS

Children, ye must be wise and circumspect:
 Remember, a wise judgment help ye hither,
 With eld for pilot, safe and fatherly,
 Across unruly seas. And here on land
 I will take thought for you and keep you safe,
 If ye set down my words in your heart's tables. 200
 Far off I can discern a cloud of dust,
 Ever the voiceless courier of hosts,
 Before the noise of wheels reacheth the ear,
 When axles pipe unheard. I can distinguish
 An armed mass, with shields and tossing spears,
 Horses and chariots of war recurved.
 'Tis likely that the Princes of this land
 Have heard of us from messengers and come
 To be their own intelligencers. Whether
 They mean no harm, or sharp resentment speeds 210
 This stern array, all things concur herein;
 That ye, fair daughters, make this hill your seat;
 Dear is it to the gods of festival,
 Pastime and sport and peaceful rivalries.

More strong than castle tower an altar stands,
 A buckler inexpugnably secure.
 Then with all speed ascend; and with you take
 In solemn ceremonial your wands
 Wound with white favours that appeal to Zeus,
 The God of Mercy. To these foreign lords 220
 Answering in such wise as shall move their mercy,
 With lamentations and all forms of speech
 Proper to your necessity, and fit
 For strangers in a strange land, plainly tell
 The story of your flight, and how from blood
 'Tis wholly free. Let nought of boldness wait
 On your discourse: nothing of light or vain
 Be seen, but downward looks, untroubled eyes:
 Not forward in the telling of your tale,
 Nor hanging back: 'tis easy to offend 230
 The race that dwelleth here. Never forget
 Your cue is to submit: ye come as poor
 And needy suitors, aliens, and exiles.
 Bold speech consorts not with the weaker side.

CHORUS

Father, thy cautions find us well disposed
 To prudent counsels, and thy wise precepts
 I shall with all solicitude obey.
 Zeus, our progenitor, watch over us.

DANAUS

Stay not: lay hold upon the means at hand.

CHORUS

I will be with you instantly. O Zeus, 240
 Pity us, or we perish.

[They ascend the hill.]

DANAUS

May he look
 Graciously on us: if it pleases him,
 All will be well. Call now upon this child
 Of Zeus.

CHORUS

I call upon the radiant Sun,
 The saving source of health, to heal our woes,
 And pure Apollo once exiled from heaven;
 God though he is, he knows this earthly lot,
 And feels perhaps for frail mortality.

DANAUS

May he in very deed commiserate
 And stand a ready helper by our side.

250

CHORUS

Which of these Gods shall I next invoke?

DANAUS

I see
 The trident of the Isthmian King.

DANAUS

He gave
 Fair passage to our vessel: welcome fair
 May he accord on land.

DANAUS

And here is Hermes,
 After the way the Hellenes fashion him.

CHORUS

Well met indeed: I pray that he may prove
 A herald of glad tidings.

DANAUS

Bend in awe
 And adoration at the common altar
 Of all these sovereignties. On holy ground
 Crouch like a flock of doves that fear the hawk

260

For all his cousinship of wings. Even so
Fearful are ye of foes of your own blood
That would pollute your race. And if one fowl
Prey on another, how can it be pure?
And he who weds a bride against her will,
Her father not consenting, where shall he
Find purity? I trow, that when he's dead
The doer of this deed at Hades' bar
Shall stand arraigned not idly: even there,
So we believe, another Zeus holds court
Among the souls whose earthly race is run,
And passes final sentence on their crimes.
Look to yourselves, and to this lord return
Such answer, that ye fail not in your cause.

270

Enter PELASGUS.

PELASGUS

What little band is this that I salute?
Whence come ye, not, as Hellenes are, attired,
But with barbaric bravery of robes,
And fine veils finished with the weaver's spathe?
These woman's weeds are not of Argolis
Nor any part of Hellas. Herald ye
Have none; nor minister to be your friend;
Nor guide in a strange land. And how ye dared
Adventure here, thus utterly forlorn,
Is matter for amazement. By your side
Before these Gods of Festival are laid
Branches that well accord with suppliant's law.
In Hellas that surmise confirms itself:
Fair dealing must conjecture all the rest,
Were there no living voice to clear the doubt.

280

CHORUS

Touching our garb thy words are words of truth:
But how shall I address thee? Art thou one
Of the commonalty? Com'st with formal wand
Equipped for parle? Or as of this fair realm
Foremost and chief?

290

PELASGUS

Let not that vex thy heart:

Thou may'st with full assurance answer me.

I am the son of Palaechthon earth-born,

Pelasgus, of this soil the supreme lord.

And they who reap its fruits from me their king

Are called, with reason good, Pelasgians.

Over all ground towards the setting sun,

300

Wherethrough the Haliacmon flows, I reign.

Within my borders I include the land

Of the Perrhaebi, and the parts beyond

Pindus, adjoining the Chaonians,

With the high mountains of Dodona; west

I touch the salt, wet frontiers of the sea.

Thence all that stretches hitherward is mine,

The spot whereon we stand being Apia,

So called of old from one in medicine wise,

Apis, Apollo's son, prophet and healer,

310

Who from Naupactus crossed, beyond the gulf,

And purged this land of man-devouring beasts,

Which Earth, by bloody deeds done long ago,

Polluted and estranged, in mood most like

A step-dame, gendered, to dispute her soil

With man, his fanged and serpent brood-fellow.

For these did Apis on this Argive ground,

To its no small relief, with shredded herbs

And wholesome charms effect a perfect cure,

His fee, to be remembered in our prayers.

320

But, now that I have answered you, 'twere well

If one of ye declared what birth ye boast,

With brevity and clearness: this my realm

Hath little liking for long-drawn discourse.

CHORUS

Briefly and clearly then: Of Argive blood

We boast to be: the mother of our race

A cow made happy in the son she bare.

And I will fix upon this frame of truth

Its proper parts until the whole cohere.

PELASGUS

Women—strange women, ye compose a tale 330
Not credible. How can ye be of Argive blood,
More like to Libyans than our womankind?
Yea, such a plant might grow on Nilus' bank;
Methinks, these forms were coined in Cyprian mint
Struck to the life by your progenitors.
Stay: I have heard that nomads of your sex,
Horsed upon camels ride in cushioned selles
Along the coasts of Aethiopia:
They should resemble ye; or, on my life,
Had ye but bows I could have ta'en an oath 340
That ye were the unlorded Amazons
That fare on flesh. Ye must instruct me further;
I am to know more of this history.
And how ye are a seed of Argive strain.

CHORUS

Runs not the story that on Argos' earth
Io once kept the keys of Hera's house?

PELASGUS

'Tis very sure she did: the fame thereof
Lives yet throughout the land.

CHORUS

And more by token;
The heart of Zeus was stung with love of her?

PELASGUS

Troth, 'twas no secret: Hera wrought amain 350
To foil his fancy.

CHORUS

And this royal quarrel
How doth it end in the story?

PELASGUS

The Argive goddess
Transformed the maid into a cow.

CHORUS

And Zeus
Is fain to have the comely beast fair-horned?

PELASGUS

Indeed the tale is told so: to that end
He wore the likeness of a lustful bull.

CHORUS

What counter-stroke to this dealt Zeus' haught Queen?

PELASGUS

Why, then she found a keeper for the cow,
Him that hath eyes which look all ways at once.

CHORUS

And what was he, this all-beholding one, 360
Sole neatherd of a solitary cow?

PELASGUS

Argus, earth's child, the same that Hermes slew.

CHORUS

And the device that followed? What thing else
Prepared she for the heifer heaven-accursed?

PELASGUS

She did afflict her with the gnat that stings,
A drover's goad-prick to stampeding kine.

CHORUS

They call him 'Gadfly' on the banks of Nile.

PELASGUS

What? Did he drive her forth from her own land
As far as Nile?

CHORUS

He did so: and thy tale
Tallies in each particular with mine. 370

PELASGUS

And is it true then that she reached Canopus
And Memphis far inland?

CHORUS

Surely; and Zeus
By laying-on of hands raised up a son.

PELASGUS

Who then is he that boasts himself the calf
Zeus gendered on this cow?

CHORUS

Even Epaphus,
True title given from that divine caress.

PELASGUS

And Epaphus—had he issue?

CHORUS

He begat
Libya, the reaper of a third of earth,
Her amplest fields.

PELASGUS

What scion sprang from her?

CHORUS

My father's father, Bel, who had two sons. 380

PELASGUS

Tell me, I pray, thy sire's all-sapient name.

CHORUS

Danaus: he hath a brother who begot
Two score and ten sons.

PELASGUS

Prithee, indulge me further;
And let me hear by what name he is called?

CHORUS

Aegyptus. Now thou know'st my ancient line,
Stretch forth the hand of succour to raise up
Argives, that here have taken sanctuary.

PELASGUS

Anciently, I do verily believe,
A common tie unites ye to this land.
But how had ye the courage to forsake
The house of your fathers? What so sore mischance
Hath fallen on ye? 390

CHORUS

King of the Pelasgians!
Calamity is as a ruffling breeze
That glances through a thousand shifting forms;
Nor is there anywhere on earth a place
Where thou could'st point and say: 'Here sorrow's wing
Keeps darkly constant to its native hue.'
For which of us in fancy ever dreamed
Of this unlooked-for flight; or that a ship
Whereon we sailed should touch this Argive strand 400
Wherewith we had affinity of old;
Or that in distant Egypt wedlock scorned,
Unhappied by the hymeneal choir,
Should be the cause of consequence so strange?

PELASGUS

What is the boon thou sayest thou dost crave
Here in the name of these Gods of festival,
Your branches fresh-plucked all with white enwound?

CHORUS

That I may ne'er become bondslave and thrall
Unto Aegyptus' race.

PELASGUS

And is it hate
That prompts thy plea, or reverence of law? 410

CHORUS

Nay, who amongst their own blood kin would buy
Their lords and masters?

PELASGUS

Yet it is a match
That makes for power.

CHORUS

And if misfortune come
Who cares if wife so wed be put away?

PELASGUS

What shall I do then that I may be found
To-you-ward a respecter of the Right?

CHORUS

Refuse to yield us up to Aegyptus' sons
When they demand us of thee.

PELASGUS

There thou broachest
Grave matters, that envisage dangerous war.

CHORUS

Yet Justice champions those that fight for her.

420

PELASGUS

If I had had my share in these events
From the beginning——

CHORUS

O! Assume it now!

And, as 'twere, this high deck and laurelled poop
Of a most stately vessel honour duly.

PELASGUS

Indeed, when I look round me and behold
This haunt of Gods all branched and shaded o'er,
I shudder.

CHORUS

Where is he who would not pause?
The wrath of Zeus the Suppliant's God is heavy.

Stop not thine ears, O son of Palaechthon,
Nor hold thy heart aloof, thou royal man,
But hearken when I cry to thee, whose throne
Is over this wide realm Pelasgian.
Behold, in me a suppliant sues for grace,
A hunted thing still forced to shift her ground,
Like to a heifer with the wolves in chase
That to the herd doth lowingly complain
Upon some rocky precipice crag-bound,
Trusting his strength and telling him her pain.

430

PELASGUS

Methinks I see this gathering of the Gods
Of festival, with branches freshly plucked
All shaded o'er, nodding in grave assent.
Oh, may your cause who claim to be our kin

440

Work us no mischief, nor on any hand
Strife grow from what we neither could foresee
Nor have provided for. That to this realm
Were an unwanted, a superfluous care.

CHORUS

Law that doth vindicate the suppliant's right,
Daughter of Zeus who deals the destiny,
Look to it that I bring not in my flight
Mischief and wrong that wreck felicity. 450
And, thou with eld's too sober wisdom wise,
From younger hearts 'tis not too late to learn,
The noblest offering, purest sacrifice
On altars of oblation ever laid,
Sweeter than sweetest essence faith can burn,
Is mercy to the weak that ask for aid.

PELASGUS

It is not at my private hearth ye sit;
And if some public mischief be afoot
Then must the commons of this realm work out
Such expiation as shall cleanse them all. 460
Myself might tender no effectual pledge
But with the privity of all free men.

CHORUS

Thou art both liberty and law
And commonalty; thine
An absolute prerogative
No captious rights confine;
Thou rul'st the hearth place of thy land,
The Godhead's central shrine,
By an indisputable nod.
Sole-sceptred on thy throne, 470
All business that concerns the state
Thou dost dispatch alone.
Beware lest unregarded wrong
Let in contagion.

PELASGUS

Contagion fall upon mine enemies.
 Howbeit, to help thee and take myself
 No hurt I scarce know how. Yet 'twere scant kindness
 To set thy prayers at nought. Perplexity
 And fears possess my heart, whether to act,
 Or not to act and let fate have her way.

480

CHORUS

Look up unto the Watcher set on high,
 The Guardian of necessitous souls who sue,
 Crouched on a neighbour's hearth, for sanctuary,
 Craving in vain the right which is their due.
 For grace denied and suppliants' slighted pleas
 Endure the wrath of Zeus, no pangs of guilt appease.

PELASGUS

If by the law of the land Aegyptus' sons
 Are your rightful lords, to wit, upon the plea
 Of next-kin, who would choose resist their claim?
 Your answer must be founded on the law
 Domestic; and ye must maintain and prove
 That over ye they have no power at all.

490

CHORUS

Into the hands of tyrant man
 God grant that I fall never:
 I 'll know no bounds but the starry span
 That bends o'er earth for ever:
 Fled to that virgin liberty
 I 'll live from forceful marriage free.
 Be thou the ally of Justice and not Law;
 Judge thou as judge the Gods and stand of them in awe.

500

PELASGUS

No easy judgment: choose not me for judge.
 Have I not said without the people's voice
 I will not and I cannot, King though I be,

Do as thou 'lt have me do? I will not hear—
 If it should chance that aught untoward fall—
 Reproachful commons cast it in my teeth
 'To honour strangers thou didst wreck thy land!'

CHORUS

Ancestral Zeus, of both blood-kin,
 Eyes suppliant and pursuer:
 The ponderable stuff of sin 510
 Is charged to the wrong doer;
 Quick is the tell-tale hand to mount
 And reckon to the just's account
 The fair record of righteousness.
 Since equal is the poise why shrink from fair redress?

PELASGUS

This asks deep thought: an eye within the mind,
 Keen as a diver salving sunken freight,
 To sink into the depths, yet, searching there,
 Not lose itself in roving phantasies;
 That all end well and mischief follow not 520
 First for the State, which is our chief concern,
 Then for ourselves; and neither war lay hold
 On loot to pay your loss, nor by our act,
 If from this seat of Gods that ye have made
 Your seat, we yield you up, the land be crushed
 By haunting visitations of the God
 Whose business is destruction, Alastor,
 The unforgetting instrument of wrath,
 Who even in the house of Hades suffers not
 The dead man to go free. And this asks not 530
 Heart-searchings, fathom-deep, of saving thought?

CHORUS

Search deep and then rise up more strong
 For justice: be the minister
 That reverentially protects from wrong
 The stranger and the sojourner,
 Resolved never to yield while thou stand'st by
 An exile driven so far in godless outlawry.

O look not on till rapine come
And from these haunts of Powers divine
Hale me for spoil: all masterdom, 540
All judicature here are thine.
Then in this cause let thy decree go forth:
'Man's lusts here sue for judgment,' and beware of wrath.

Submit not to the sight
Of divine Justice set at naught by might,
And the rejected suppliant led away
From statues holy, as by bands of gold
A horse is led, while rough men lay
Rude hands upon my raiment's damask fold.

Thy seed and thy household 550
As thou art cruel or in mercy bold,
The exact measure of thy 'yea' or 'nay'
Eternal Law shall utterly requite.
O ponder well these things, and sway
The event as Zeus commands, who judgeth right.

PELASGUS

Nay, I have pondered and my bark of thought
Strikes on this point of peril. There's no choice
But of two sides I must take arms 'gainst one,
And either were a war of magnitude.
Here then you have the naked shell: stark hull, 560
Triced on the stocks, all rivets driven home,
And all her timbers strained and drawn together,
As 'twere, with shipwright's winches. Once at sea
She's bound for loss before she comes to land.
When there is jettison of merchandise,
By the good grace of Zeus the Garnisher
More may be gotten, a full load to freight
A ship of deeper draught. And, if the tongue
Shoot wildly, for the wound that words inflict
Words will apply the remedy, a balm 570
For angry humours, spell and counterspell:
But, that there be no letting of the blood

Of kin, compels to earnest sacrifice,
 And many victims unto many gods,
 Where'er men ask of oracles, must fall,
 Preservatives against calamity.
 My entrance to this quarrel comes unsought
 And every way 'tis to my own undoing.
 I 'd rather be a seer of little skill
 Than deeply learned in prophesying ill:
 So, though my judgment goes not with the prayer,
 Out of these troubles Heaven send issue fair.

580

CHORUS

Hear the conclusion, then, of my much speech
 That meant to move your pity.

PELASGUS

I have heard:
 But speak: I mark thee closely.

CHORUS

I have scarves
 And girdles that hold up my raiment——

PELASGUS

Why,
 All women have them.

CHORUS

Out of these I 'll fashion
 An ornament and excellent device
 To keep mine honour safe.

PELASGUS

Give thy words meaning:
 What is it thou would'st say?

CHORUS

Give us a pledge,
Plant on some ground of faith these feeble feet;
If not——

590

PELASGUS

These gatherings, girdlings up of robes,
How shall they stead thee?

CHORUS

They shall serve to deck
These shapes with votive tablets never yet
Hanged up on hallowed images.

PELASGUS

A riddle!
The manner of this: expound.

CHORUS

Incontinent
We 'll hang ourselves upon these holy Gods.

PELASGUS

Thy menace lays the lash across my heart.

CHORUS

I see thou understand'st me: now have I
Opened thine eyes to clearer vision.

PELASGUS

Yea,
Turn where I may, griefs ineluctable
Confront my sight: a multitude of ills
Comes on like a river: on this sea of ruin
I am embarked: the bottomless abyss
Below; around unnavigable waves;
And nowhere any harbour from distress.
If I shall fail towards you and not exact

600

This debt which is your right, ye threaten me
 With such pollution, strain words how ye will,
 Hyperbole cannot o'ershoot the mark. 610
 And if I stand before the city wall
 And try conclusions with Aegyptus' sons,
 Your own blood kin, upon the field of battle,
 For sake of women men must stain this earth
 With blood: and were not that bitter expense
 To charge myself withal? Yet there's no help
 But I must hold in awe the wrath of Zeus
 Who helpeth suppliants: the fear of him
 Is for all flesh the highest fear. Now, therefore,
 Thou venerable father of these maids, 620
 Take in thy hands branches like these and lay them
 On other altars of my country's Gods,
 That of your coming all the citizens
 May see a visible token: let not fall
 One word of me: the commonalty loves
 To cast reproach upon their rulers. But,
 Looking thereon, pity may move some soul
 With hatred for the wickedness of men
 Banded against you; and the public heart
 Be for your boughs more tender. 'Tis a trait 630
 Common with men to entertain kind thoughts
 Towards the weaker side.

DANAUS

That we have found a friend
 Pitiful and God-fearing we account
 Worth many favours. Wilt thou grant one more
 And with me send some native to this land
 For escort and as guides, that we may find
 The altars of the city deities
 That stand before the temples, and the shrines
 Of those more warlike that defend your keep?
 The form that nature gave us is not yours, 640
 Nor are we habited as ye are. Nile
 Nourisheth other folk than Inachus.
 Beware lest an unheedful confidence
 Hereafter breed dismay. Men have ere now
 Slain those that were their friends, not knowing it.

PELASGUS

Go with this stranger, men: for he says well.
Show him the way to the town altars and
The seats of Gods. And look ye bruit it not
At cross-roads, that ye bring this seafarer
To sit upon the hearths of the Holy Ones.

650

[Exit DANAUS with bodyguard.]

CHORUS

For him the word is spoken: let him go
Since thou commandest it. But what of me?
What shall I do, and where dost thou assign
For me a place of safety?

PELASGUS

Leave thy branches
Where thou art now as a token of distress.

CHORUS

I lay them where thy hand and tongue direct.

PELASGUS

Now thou art free to walk about this smooth
And level lawn.

CHORUS

This lawn where all may tread?
And how shall that protect me?

PELASGUS

Be content:
'Tis not our purpose to expose thee here
A prey for birds.

660

CHORUS

For birds? And what of foes
More dangerous than serpents?

PELASGUS

Fair and softly!

Thou see'st I speak thee fair.

CHORUS

It is not strange

That fear betray uneasiness.

PELASGUS

Methinks

The awe of Kings exceedeth evermore
All fears beside.

CHORUS

O cheer me with kind words!

And hearten me no less with gracious deeds.

PELASGUS

Nay, but 'tis not for long that thy good sire
Hath left thee. I too leave thee for a while,
But 'tis to call our folk together, make
The commons thy good friends; and teach thy father
How he should speak to them. Tarry meantime,
Therefore, and with thy prayers prevail upon
The gods of the land to grant thy heart's desire.
I will depart hence and make good my words.
Persuasion and fair fortune follow us.

670

[Exit PELASGUS. *The DANAIDES descend on to the open lawn below the hill.*]

CHORAL HYMN

King of Kings, among the Blest
In thy bliss the blessedest,
In thy power of all that are
Mighty, mightiest by far,
Happy Zeus, that prayer receive,
And the event our wish achieve.

680

Drive aloof the lusts of men;
With thy loathing visit them;
Plunge 'neath an empurpled sea
That embodied infamy
Pitched without and black within
With havoc and the purposed sin.
But the woman's cause espouse:
Think upon our storied house, 690
Tenderly the tale renewing
Of old love and eager wooing:
And our ancestress to be,
Woman, yet once dear to thee.
Ah, remember Long Ago,
Thou Comforter of Io's woe!
For we boast that we can trace
High as Zeus our ancient race:
Sojourners were we at birth;
This is home, this parent earth. 700

In the print flower-sweet
Of my mother's feet,
Behold, I have planted mine:
Where she stooped to feed
Knee-deep in the mead
That fattens the Argive kine:
And with her alway
To haunt and betray
The eye of the earthborn herd.
Far hence lies her road, 710
By the gadfly goad,
As a skiff with the oar-blade, spurred:
She must know the pain
Of a maddened brain
And wander through many races,
Till 'twixt either strand
Of the sundered land
A path through the billows she traces.

To the Asian shore
She must pass o'er, 720
And ever her onward leap

Of her coming tells
 To the Phrygian fells
 And the fleecy moorland sheep.
 By street and tower
 That Teuthras' power
 Founded for Mysian men
 In olden time,
 She speeds; she must climb
 Through Lydian gorge and glen;
 And she must o'erleap
 The Cilician steep,
 And the wild Pamphylian mountains
 No barrier
 Shall be to her;
 Till fed by eternal fountains,
 Broad rivers glide
 And her footsteps guide
 Through a pleasant land and a mighty,
 With all wealth crowned,
 The fair, the renowned
 Wheatland of Aphrodite.

730

740

And still she flew, a hunted thing,
 Of Heaven's grace unpitied;
 And in and out with darting sting
 In dizzy reel and dazzling ring
 The wingèd herdsman flitted.

She has reached at last Zeus' own demesne
 That is to all Nature boon,
 Green with the glow of the melting snow
 And scorched by the Typhoon.

750

She has come to the tide that is deep and wide,
 Untouched by the hand of disease;
 Yea, to Nile's water King Inachus' daughter,
 Hera's crazed Thyiad, flees.

Paled then all dwellers in that lea
 With quaking fear a-cold:
 Such hybrid shape they ne'er did see:
 Half woman and half cow was she,
 A monster to behold.

760

A freakish, eerie, elfin form,
Whose kind 'twere hard to tell;
If human, out of human shape
Tortured by some dread spell.

Ah, then to charm away her grief,
Who at long last relented,
And rested the far-wandered feet
Of Io, the gnat-tormented?

Even Zeus, Lord Paramount, whose reign
Expects no earthly tyrant's bloody doom;
He eased her of her pain
With sweet constraint from all enforcement free
And breathings of his love divinely mild.
Tears as of one half-reconciled
She shed—warm tears of bitter memory;
But, with that heavenly burthen in her womb,
Became the mother of a perfect child.

770

A happy, long-lived man was he;
Wherefore a voice went through that fertile earth, 'Behold in
verity
This is the son of Zeus: this is the seed
He sowed: who else among the Gods had stayed
The crafty plots that Hera laid?
If thou should'st say, "Here is Zeus' very deed,
This is a child of heavenly birth,"
Clean to the centre shall thine arrow speed.'

780

What God to thee should I prefer,
And by a title holier
Ask Justice? Thou, O King,
Our Father art; and thy right hand
Hath planted us in a strange land;
We are thine own offspring.

790

Thou great unmatched artificer,
In the calm heart let memory stir
The pulse of vanished days,
O Zeus that art in all things blest,
And whatso'er thou purposest
None hinders nor gainsays.

Thou art no vassal on a throne;
No power that doth transcend thine own
 To thee dictates the law;
Nor is there one in higher place
To whom thou turn'st a humble face,
 Holding his seat in awe.

800

Art thou in labour with the pang
Of deeds whereon great issues hang,
 Behold, the accomplished fact!
Or if in words goes forth thy breath,
The mind that with them travaileth
 Converteth speech to act.

Enter DANAUS.

DANAUS

Take courage, children: the peoples of the land
With sovran voice have cast their votes right well.

810

CHORUS

Dear envoy! Best beloved of tidings-bearers,
All hail! But hide not one thing from us. What
Have they determined? The full master-hand
Of the assembled commons, to what deed
Points it?

DANAUS

Unwaveringly, and in such wise
As made my old heart young—for the free air,
While all freemen made this decision law,
Rustled with multitudes of lifted hands—
The Argives have decreed that we shall hold
This soil with them, immune from all reprisals,
Havoc and harrying of the lustful male;
And of those native here or alien
No man may drive us hence; withal, if force
Be offered, what-so denizen witholds
His aid, shall suffer loss of civil rights
And, furthermore, be banished by the State.

820

This was the manner of the speech, whereby
 The King of the Pelasgians in our cause
 Wrought on his auditors: with warning voice 830
 He spake of the hereafter, lest the realm
 Feed fat the wrath of Zeus, the Suppliant's God;
 We came as fugitives and foreigners,
 As citizens we were received; two claims
 Conjoined in our persons, which, denied,
 Would work two-fold contagion, and raise up
 Before the city-gates a monster, fed
 On sorrow, yet whose craw grief cannot cram.
 Then they stayed not to hear the marshal's cry
 But on a show of hands would have it so. 840
 It was the voice of the Pelasgians' King
 That moved them, suppling the persuasive word,
 But Zeus determined what the end should be.

[He ascends the hill.]

CHORAL HYMN

Oh come! Let us render
 Recompense fair!
 A token and tender
 Of thanks, and a prayer
 That good things be showered upon Argos.
 Benediction and laud and honour
 In hymns to her praises sung 850
 Shall surely be doubled upon her;
 For dear is an alien tongue
 To Zeus who cares for the stranger
 And governs the counsels of Kings;
 To an end free from harm and danger
 May he lead our thanksgivings,
 With good gifts shed upon Argos.

In your heavenly habitation,
 While I pour my heart's libation
 With the wine of prayer o'erflowing, 860
 Hear my voice, ye gods! Hereafter
 Never roar of ruddy fire
 Strike and slay Pelasgia's city,
 Nor the song be heard, where laughter

Is not, nor the dance nor lyre,
Lustful Ares' joyless strain,
Who in fields not of his sowing
Reaps the harvest of the slain.
Forasmuch as they had pity;
For that love their voice inspireth, 870
Honouring suppliants Zeus befriendeth,
Little flock that sorrow tendeth
And whose portion none desireth.

Neither did they give their voices
For proud men, to do them pleasure;
They have dealt us noble measure
Woman's weaker cause befriending:
For their loftier vision saw
The inexorable Awe,
Angry Zeus, whose wrath requiteth, 880
Whose sure aim the end achieves;
And with him is no contending.
Where's the dwelling that rejoices
'Neath his heavy visitation—
Like a carrion-bird that lighteth,
Dropping down abomination,
Gorged and bloated, on man's eaves?
Heavily the monster squatteth,
An unlifted, leaden burden.
But these kin have not rejected 890
Claim of kin: they have respected
Suppliants at Zeus' holy seat.
Therefore they shall have their guerdon,
Altars no pollution spotteth,
To the Gods of Heaven sweet.

Forth, thou bird of plume more fair;
From the mouth's dark covert break,
Emulous and eager prayer;
All prayers else do thou o'ertake.

Never pestilence nor dearth 900
Empty Argos of her men:
Nor civil tumult stain this earth
With blood of fallen brethren.

Youth be here an unplucked flower;
And Ares, who makes men to mourn,
Though lord of Aphrodite's bower,
That comely blossom leave unshorn.

And, where ancient men convene,
Let there not want within these walls
Bearded benchers of grave mien
Throned in old Cyclopiian stalls. 910

So may wise laws and well-obeyed
Order all things in the land,
Long as reverence is paid
To Zeus, and chiefly Him whose hand
Is over strangers. He alone
Maintains the right 'gainst wrong and crime,
And confirms to each his own
By law and precept grey with time.

Everything that fruitful is 920
Spring anew from fecund earth,
And may arrowy Artemis
Bring the struggling babe to birth.

Havoc, come not to rive this land;
Nor bring no arms for Ares' hand,
Who loveth neither dance nor lyre;
Children he hath at his desire
But they are tears: nor the drawn knife
Whet for the dagger-hand of strife
And civil uproar: keep far hence, 930
Ye croaking flocks of pestilence;
And all young things in this fair ground
Be with thy love, Lycean, crowned.

Zeus make the earth to teem, and bless
With seasonable toll and cess
Of gathered fruit and corn in shocks:
And may the forward-feeding flocks

In her rich pastures multiply:
And all things have prosperity
By the Gods' favour flourishing: 940
Let minstrels round her altars sing
Sweet lauds; and while the lute leads on
Pure lips send up their orison.

A power obnoxious to no term
Be here: not novel and infirm;
 Soon blown and soon decayed,
 But on old honour stayed;
Prescient in counsel, and withal
Of such foreknowledge liberal;
 Not jealous to exclude 950
 The sovran multitude,
But rather guide them. And abroad
Let them be slow to draw the sword,
 Much readier to maintain
 By processes humane
Their legal right, than prompt to act:
If bounden, faithful to their pact,
 Their arbiter the Court,
And war their last resort.

Let them keep fasts and festivals, 960
Bring wreaths of bay and slaughter bulls,
 As did their sires of old,
 To the Lord Gods who hold
Their land. For reverence and awe
From son to sire is the third law
Justice hath writ for men
With monumental pen.

DANAUS

Dear children, I commend these temperate prayers.
Tremble not if I break to you bad news.
From this our sanctuary and my watch-tower 970
I see the ship. No, I am not mistaken:
All too discernible is the sail—so bent—
The awnings—and the prow with painted eyes

That look before on the untravelled road—
 And the quick sense, too quick for those she loves not,
 To hearken to the guiding of the helm.
 The men on board, their black limbs clothed in white,
 Are plain to see. And now the other craft,
 Store-ships and all, are in full view. The admiral
 Is shortening sail, and, all oars out, rows hard 980
 Under the lee of the land. This must be faced
 With a fixed constancy: let not dismay
 Divert your thoughts from these still watchful Gods.
 I will return anon when I have gotten
 Defence and counsel. Like enough a herald—
 Or delegates that mean to force you hence—
 Graspers at harsh reprisals—nay, but that
 Can never be and ye've no cause to fear it.
 Nevertheless, if human aid be slow,
 Remember, here ye have a present help. 990
 Be of good cheer then; where is he who scorns
 The Gods and shall not in Time's great assize
 Upon the day appointed, answer it?

[He descends from the hill.]

CHORUS

Father, I am afraid: the ships have come
 So quickly, with scant interval between.
 I am possessed with dread,
 Doubts and fears importune me,
 Lest that my flight far-spined
 No way should fortune me.

Oh, when the goal is won, 1000
 The struggle nought availeth me;
 Father, I am fordome;
 For fear my strength faileth me.

DANAUS

Child, pluck up courage. The recorded vote
 Of Argos is a sovran people's voice:
 Certain I am that they will fight for thee.

CHORUS

Aegyptus' sons are wild, abandoned men;
Their lust of battle hard to be appeased:
And if I say so thy heart knows 'tis true.

They have gotten them stalwart ships, 1010
The stout oak braces:
They have gotten them shining ships
With cruel steely faces.

They set a course o'er unknown waves;
They struck an unseen quarry:
And multitudes of tawny slaves
Summoned to their foray.

DANAUS

Ay, but they 'll meet their match; a multitude
Whose arms by oft exposure to the blaze
Of burning noon are firm as marble filed. 1020

CHORUS

I pray you, leave me not alone, my father.
Left to herself a woman is but nought:
She hath no stomach for brave deeds of war.

But they are men in mind and heart deranged;
Possessed, yea, mad with godless lust and pride:
The human soul in them so much estranged
From holy thoughts, mercy and truth and awe,
They reckon them less than crows, with beak and claw,
That rob the altars of things sanctified.

DANAUS

My children, this shall nothing profit them: 1030
That which provokes in you resentful thoughts
Shall work the wrath of the immortal Gods.

CHORUS

Father, they fear no tridents: neither can
Arrow or thunderbolt restrain their hands.

They are too much swollen with their own conceit
For awe to sway them; and in violent pride
Have run too far to stay their reckless feet
For aught that preacheth from these holy bounds:
But like a pack of disobedient hounds
They would not hear, though all the Gods should chide. 1040

DANAUS

Ay, but three dogs are not a match for one
Grey wolf: nor can the byblus-fruit compare
With wheaten corn.

CHORUS

They are as savage beasts,
All fury and all lust and all uncleanness;
We must defend ourselves against their attack
As quickly as we may.

DANAUS

Nay, there is time:
Fleets neither set sail nor are brought to anchor
All in a moment: nor, when anchors hold,
Are they who shepherd ships so quick to moor
And trust their safety to a cable's stretch. 1050
And least of all when they have come to a land
That hath no haven, and night draweth on.
For when the sun departeth, night breeds care
For a good seaman; troops cannot be landed
With safety till a ship be snugly berthed.
Then with a quiet mind be vigilant
And ever mindful of the Gods, that so
Ye make their succour certain. For the state,
They shall not need to chide your messenger
Because he's old. For with the spirit of youth 1060
Here in my heart it needs must prompt my tongue.

[Exit.

CHORAL HYMN

Ho! Land of hills—
Protectress, held in awe
Of old—now by new bonds of treaty-law
Knit to our hearts—what ills
Must we yet suffer at the hands of men?
Where shall we find a refuge, holy one?
In all this Apian earth is there no glen,
No haunt of darkness hollowed from the sun,
Where we may hide? 1070

I would I were black smoke; a vapour dun
Drawn upwards to the clouds of Zeus' bright day.
Or might I vanish quite away,
Soaring where none should see me; none
Follow: lost in the wide
Of heaven, like dust that needs no wing
To waft it in aerial vanishing.
No refuge left:
No shelter from the slow
Insistent on-fall of unshunnable woe. 1080
As waters in a cleft

My heart's blood eddies turbulent and black.
And this last touch of bitterest irony
Things in themselves untoward do not lack,
That all my father's lookings forth to sea
My feet enmesh;
'Tis I for fear have well nigh ceased to be.
I would about my neck a noose were bound;
I would that there the fated shaft were found
Winged with the wished-for liberty; 1090
Ere flesh from amorous flesh
Recoiling feel the touch abhorred,
I would that I were dead and Hades had for lord.

Oh for a throne in stainless air
Where the moist and dripping cloud
Touches and is turned to snow.
Oh for a smooth and slippery rock
Where the wild goat fears to climb
And no intruding son of Time
Points a finger. Lone and bare 1100

And wrapped in contemplation proud
It o'erhangs the gulf below;
There lean vultures flap and flock;
And, as if indeed it were
A living spirit, its blind wall
Shall bear record of my fall
Headlong—all my sorrows ending
And heartless love which is heart's rending.

Then, I grudge not dogs their prey;
Then, this body of mine shall feast 1110
Birds that haunt the valley grounds.
There 's no anguish in such wounds:
They can never bleed afresh.
Dying is to be released
From all ills our living flesh
Would with wailing wish away.
Come with swift forestalling stride,
Death, ere darker deed be done
In the chamber of the bride.
For of all the paths that run 1120
O'er the broad earth 'neath the sun
That which leads to the unwinding
Of my sorrow is past finding.

Cry to Heaven; prayer's full oblation
Moves the Gods and sets me free.
Father, from thy habitation
Watch the battle soon to be.
Turn away from guilt the splendour
Of those eyes whose light is law;
Strong, be thou the weak's defender, 1130
Zeus, who hold'st the world in awe.

For the male hath sought and found me.
Fleeing, whither shall I fly?
Egypt's sons will soon have bound me
Wildered with their battle-cry.
Thine the mighty beam suspended;
All things tremble in thy scale.
What can be begun or ended
Without thee for bliss or bale?

Oh me! I am undone!
What evil errand bringeth thee ashore,
Pirate? A rescue! Ho!
This is the entering in of woe,
But more will follow—more!
To our divine protectors run!
Pelagus—Lord
Wring their hard hearts with pangs they cannot bear!

[*The CHORUS ascend the hill. Enter an EGYPTIAN
HERALD with SAILORS.*]

HERALD

Aboard! Aboard!
Get to the dhow as fast as feet can carry ye!
Else, I'll pluck out your hair,
Drive ye before me with the slaver's goad,
Hack heads off till blood spouts like rain.
Back to the ship again,
And may the red plague harry ye!

CHORUS

I would that somewhere on the weltering road
Of multitudinous ocean ye had sunk,
That of its bitter waters ye had drunk
Enough to drown your bark and quench your pride.
Then were we happy sitting side by side,
Even as now we were,
Free from trouble, free from care,
Hid in this leafy bower.
Once and for all hear my commands; lay by
Violence and wrong and mad impiety.
Hence from this holy spot,
And anger not
The Argive power.
Ah, may I never see again the flood
That fatteneth the flesh of Egypt's kine,
And breeds a procreant humour in man's blood
Even as sap clothes the bare bough with green.
Argive I am of long descended line,
Queen, and the daughter of a Queen.

HERALD

Rant—rail your fill,
But whether ye will not or ye will
Ye must aboard!

CHORUS

Alack! Why tarry they?
Make speed, or we are lost!

HERALD

If ye delay,
From where ye sit I 'll drag ye with these hands.

CHORUS

O'er ocean-lawns sheeted with salt sea-spume
May ye be dragged and driven to and fro,
With helpless tossings of those cruel hands,
Where from the Syrian coast the wild winds blow
With wailing heard along the mounded sands
Beneath Sarpedon's tomb.

1180

HERALD

Shriek, wail, and howl and call upon the Gods.
'Tis not so light a thing to overleap.
A ship of Egypt. Wherefore tune thy voice
To sadder music, a more bitter curse.

CHORUS

The dark wave whelm thee rounding ness on ness
Where Cyprus' forests clothe her capes of wrath,
And Nile, that mighty Nile which sent thee forth,
Strike out thy name—one insolent the less.

1190

HERALD

Aboard! Aboard! The ship has put about
Ready to go to sea. Get thee aboard,
Or I will lug thee by the forelock.

[He rushes at the DANAIDES, followed by his men.]

CHORUS

Father, a thing in human shape and yet
A lurker in the net
That Evil spins for mortal woe,
Like an industrious spider to and fro
Weaves link by link and thread by thread
Its latticed snare.
Earth, Mother Earth, the spectre dread,
The black nightmare
Drive far away,
O Mother Earth! O Father Zeus, I pray!

1200

HERALD

I am not fearful of your Argive Gods:
They suckled not my youth nor fed my age.

CHORUS

What shall I call thee? A two-footed snake,
A viper creeping from the brake
With venom'd fang to bruise
My heel. O Mother Earth,
Drive hence the beast of monstrous birth!
Hear, Mother Earth! Harken, O Father Zeus!

1210

HERALD

Get thee aboard and with a better grace;
Else shall thy gauzes, muslins, and thy veils
Cry out for ruth and rending reck them not.

CHORUS

They overpower me! Chiefs, lords, princes, save!

HERALD

Anon, anon! Courage! Thou soon shalt have
Princes enow: Aegyptus' fifty sons!
Be of good cheer; thou shalt not lack for lords!

1220

CHORUS

Lost, lost—O King—O sacrilegious slave!

HERALD

I have thee now; heave her aboard by the hair:
She 's a slack one and slow of hearing.

Enter PELASGUS with armed ATTENDANTS.

PELASGUS

Hold!

Ruffian, what 's this? How darest thou insult
Pelagian soil, ay, and Pelasgia's sons?
Or dost thou think thou 'rt come to a land where none
But women dwell? Barbarian to Greek
Is used to be more humble. Thou wilt find
That thy wild shooting misses the just scope
And aim of action, reckoning up thy wrong.

1230

HERALD

I take thee at thy word and ask thee, where
I reach beyond what law and justice warrant?

PELASGUS

First thou 'rt an alien; yet most ignorant
Of what becomes thee in that quality.

HERALD

Who? I? I found what had been lost: no more.

PELASGUS

Have not you aliens your officers?
And which of these didst thou bespeak?

HERALD

Hermes,

The Lord of trover.

PELASGUS

O! are Gods thy patrons,
And dost thou serve them with dishonour?

HERALD

I

Pay worship to the Gods of mighty Nile.

1240

PELASGUS

And ours are nought, if I hear thee aright.

HERALD

Look you, these women are mine and in my power:
Let me see him who dares to take them from me.

PELASGUS

Lay hands upon them at thy peril.

HERALD

To a stranger! 'Tis not hospitable. This

PELASGUS

Tush!

I waste no courtesy on aliens
Who violate the sanctuary of the Gods.

HERALD

Aegyptus' sons shall hear of this.

PELASGUS

I care not.

HERALD

Good: but that I may make a clear report—
As heralds should—what shall I say? By whom
Am I dismissed, sent empty-handed back,
These women—cousins, close in blood withal—
Taken from me? Not that weight of evidence
Will here determine in what sense the doom
That Ares must pronounce shall be decreed,
Nor are the damages assessed in coin
And there an end. No: long ere that can be
Many a tall fellow first must bite the dust
And lives be gasped away with writhing of limbs.

1250

PELASGUS

Why should I tell thee who I am? In time 1260
 Thou'lt learn my name; thou and thy fellows too.
 As for these women, went they willingly,
 Were they content, thou might'st lead them away,
 Could'st thou show cause that piety allows.
 But now the sovran people of this realm
 Have with one voice established their decree
 Never to yield their virtue up to force.
 And through and through that act the nail is driven
 So that it standeth fast. Thou hast my answer;
 Not writ in folded tablets, nor yet sealed 1270
 In any secret scroll: but overt, the plain speech
 Of an unfettered tongue. Now—quit my sight.

HERALD

May victory and power that victory gives
 Be with the men.

PELASGUS

Oh, ye will find men here,
 Trust me, no bousers of thin barley-brew.
[Exit HERALD and his followers.]

And now with your handmaidens all of you
 Walk boldly to the city. 'Tis well fenced
 And locked with deep device of wards and towers.
 Many fair dwellings are maintainèd there
 At the public charge. With no illiberal hand 1280
 Myself am lodged. Here ye may share a house
 With others, or, if it likes ye, live alone.
 The best is at your service: take your choice
 And let it be the fairest ye can find:
 'Twill cost ye nothing. Look upon myself
 And the whole body of the citizens,
 Whose mandate this effects, as your protectors.
 More powerful patrons ye 've no need to ask.

CHORUS

Sire, may your great courtesy
 Plenteously rewarded be. 1290

Please you now to send to us
 Our brave father, Danaus;
 His wise forethought points our way;
 Where he counsels we obey.
 He will choose us our abode
 In some kindly neighbourhood.
 For so it is, strange speech, strange ways
 Are a mark for men's dispraise.
 Happier be our lot: may we
 Dwell with honour in your land 1300
 Free from hatred, censure-free.

[*Exit PELASGUS.*]

Captives of the bow and spear,
 Yet not uncherished, not less dear,
 Each in order take your stand
 By your mistresses, for you
 Are our maiden retinue
 That Danaus in his day of power
 Gave us for a queenly dower.

Enter DANAUS with armed guard.

DANAUS

Children, unto the Argives offer prayers,
 Blood-offerings and libations, as to Gods 1310
 Olympian! for our saviours they are
 Past question. When I told their magistrates
 How ye were used, their friendly hearts received
 My tidings in such wise as to our kin
 Shall prove a draught of bitter wine. Myself
 This body-guard of spearmen they assigned,
 Both that I might be honourably attended,
 And lest by sudden sword-stroke I should fall
 Ere they could rescue me, unto their land
 A burden and a curse for ever. Wherefore 1320
 Let gratitude to them hold in your hearts
 The highest place and set your course. Moreover
 To much already graven there add this
 Paternal precept. Time assays the worth
 Of things unknown; and every tongue is busy
 With a new-comer's reputation, not
 Oftenest for good: a word and 'tis bespattered.

Shame me not in your youth when all men's eyes
 Will look your way. 'Tis difficult to guard
 The tender fruit. It is desired of men 1330
 With patient watchings—for desire is human—
 Of feathered fowls and beasts that walk the earth.
 So with the body: when 'tis melting ripe,
 Trust Cypris but the world will hear of it
 If once she find the orchard-gate unlatched.
 Then at the loveliness of virgin bloom
 An arrow winged with dangerous charm is shot
 From every roving eye, vanquished at sight
 By irresistible desire. Let not
 Our wills succumb to that the which to escape 1340
 We bore much toil, ploughed many perilous seas
 On shipboard: neither let us work ourselves
 Shame and confusion, to mine enemies
 Triumph and very bliss. A double choice
 Is ours. Pelasgus and the State at large
 Each offer us a home; and both are free.
 You see Fate throws us sixes. It remains
 That ye your father's precepts strictly keep,
 Counting your virtue dearer than your lives.

CHORUS

In all things else may the Olympian Gods 1350
 Prosper us. For my youth fear not, my father,
 In this ripe season of my beauty. If
 The Gods have not appointed some new thing
 I mean to walk where heretofore I trod.

CHORAL HYMN

Set forward to the city then
 And to her Gods give thanks,
 Lords of their bliss within her walls
 Or dwellers by the banks

Of Erasinus old. And you,
 Dear maids, our music sweet 1360
 Accompany with clapping hands
 And dance of rhythmic feet.

Our song is of Pelasgia's town,
And we will hymn no more
The fullness of the fluctuant Nile,
But placid streams that pour

Deep draughts for thirsty lips, and cheer
The land with childish mirth,
Turning stiff tracts of stubborn ground
To soft and fertile earth.

1370

Chaste Artemis, watch over us,
And love come in tender guise,
Not forced by Cytherea's might;
We wish our foes that prize.

SEMI-CHORUS

But we forget not Cypris. Let none deem
Our harmless song is meant in her dispraise.
For she with Hera sways
The heart of Zeus, and he is Lord Supreme.
The subtle Goddess hath her rites—with young
Desire playing at his mother's side;
Nor less Persuasion to whose charming tongue
No boon that heart can give or worth approves
May be denied.
Yea, music hath her share
In Aphrodite's Empire fair,
Music with all the train of whispering Loves.

1380

SEMI-CHORUS

All is fulfilled as Destiny decrees,
And Zeus is great: it is not given to men
To thwart his purposes
Or reach beyond the bounds that he hath set.
Pray rather, then,
That once the rite be said,
This marriage that we so much dread
May bring more bliss than ever wife knew yet.

1390

SEMI-CHORUS

May the great Zeus grant that I ne'er
Wed with a son of King Aegyptus.

SEMI-CHORUS

Yea,
That boon were best of all; and yet thy prayer
Would move a will that none can sway.

SEMI-CHORUS

And thou can'st not discern futurity.

SEMI-CHORUS

Can I behold the mind of Zeus? Can I
Look into that unfathomable deep? 1400
Due measure when thou prayest thou should'st keep.

SEMI-CHORUS

Where lies the mark that may not be o'ertrud?

SEMI-CHORUS

Search not too far the purposes of God.

CHORUS

Zeus is King: may he decree
I be bounden to no lord
Loathed for lust and cruelty.
Mighty and most gentle, he
With remedial touch restored
Io in her misery 1410
To calm of mind from sorrow free.

And may he this woman's war
Crown with victory. Life and Fate
Demand that we exact no more
Than that good preponderate.
It contents me then, whate'er
The judgment which the Gods approve
If there be embodied there
Justice which my prayers could move.

[*Exeunt.*]

THE PERSIANS

(472 B.C.)

NOTE

THIS is the sole surviving Greek historical drama, though the *Phoenissae* of Phrynicus is known to have dealt with the capture of Miletus (494 B.C.). The plot is again quite simple, the opening is again lyrical; and there is a magnificent description of the battle of Salamis,¹ which may be taken substantially as an eye-witness account. *The Persae* can hardly be called a tragedy; for its purpose was not so much to lead the spectator through scenes of pity and terror as to glorify the victory of Athens. It was the second part of an apparently unconnected trilogy, of which the first and third were entitled *Phineus* and *Glaucus*. The satyric play *Prometheus* had no connection with the *Prometheus Bound*.

¹ The historical account of Salamis is given by Herodotus (VIII, 40-95).

CHARACTERS

XERXES, *King of Persia*

ATOSSA, *mother of Xerxes*

GHOST OF DARIUS, *father of Xerxes*

MESSENGER

CHORUS OF PERSIAN ELDERS

SCENE: *An open place before the Tomb of DARIUS.*

THE PERSIANS

CHORUS, *entering in procession.*

We are the faithful ministers
Of Persia's absent sons,
That marched away to Hellas;
Their golden mansions,
Rich with all wealth and splendour,
Are in our trust and care,
For the great king, King Xerxes,
Darius' son and heir,
Chose us as wise men well in years
The realm for him to hold; 10
But for his homeward progress
His host a-gleam with gold,
The boding heart is harried
With auguries of ill:
Asia is stripped of manhood;
A young king hath his will:
But to this metropolitan
Proud siege of Persia's kings
No runner comes, no rider 20
Good news or bad news brings.
To Susa and Ecbatana
They bade a long farewell;
They saw behind them sink from sight
Old Kissia's citadel;
And some rode out on horseback,
And some in long ships sailed;
Stout plodders closing up their ranks
The footmen strode all-mailed.
Amistres hasteth with them,
And great Artaphrenes, 30
Astaspes, Megabates,
Lords of rich satrapies,
Kings on whose throne a greater
Its majesty uprears,

Marshals of an uncounted host,
Bowmen and cavaliers,
They sweep for ever onward;
Their daunting looks dismay,
And jubilant are their high hearts
For joy of coming fray. 40
Lord of the bow, Imaeus,
Sosthenes, charioteer,
Artembares, the rider bold
Whom charging squadrons cheer,
Masistres and Pharandaces;
With many a doughty fere
Whom Nile, great nourisher of men,
Sent forth; Pegastogon,
Egyptian born; Susiskanes,
And Artames, whose wone 50
Is sacred Memphis—there he rules;
And Ariomardus, lord
Or Thebes, that ancient child of Time;
Marsh-folk to pull aboard
The galleys—fearsome combatants
Past count; and in their train
The langour-loving Lydians,
Lords of the Asian main.
Two royal men command them,
Arcteus of fair renown, 60
And the great lord Metrogathes;
And their all-golden town,
Sardis, hath sent forth men that ride
On cars of aspect dread,
With double yoke of horses,
And triple harnessèd:
And Tharubis and Mardon,
Of Tmolus' holy hill
Near neighbours both, have ta'en an oath
(The which may heaven fulfil) 70
To cast the yoke on Hellas
That holdeth freedom dear;
They are the stuff of iron tough,
Hard anvils to the spear.
Then come the Mysian slingers;
And golden Babylon

Hath sent a mingled, motley host,
 Endlessly winding on;
 And some are sailors of the fleet,
 And others draw the bow; 80
 All Asia pours her falchion-men;
 The great kings bids them go.
 Ay, they are gone! The bloom, the rose,
 The pride of Persian earth:
 And with a mighty longing
 The land that gave them birth,
 Asia, their nursing mother, mourns;
 And day succeeds to day,
 And wives and little ones lose heart,
 Sighing the time away. 90
 [The CHORUS forms a rectangle about the altar.]

CHORAL HYMN

I grant you that our royal host,
 The wallèd city's scourge,
 Hath long since reached the neighbour coast
 That frowns across the surge;
 Hath roped with moorèd rafts the strait,
 Their path the heaving deck,
 At Athamantid Helle's Gate
 Upon the sea's proud neck
 Bolting a yoke from strand to strand:
 And Asia's hordes, I grant, 100
 Outnumber the uncoun ted sand:
 Our king is valiant:
 He shepherdeth a mighty flock,
 God's benison therewith,
 Till iron arms all Hellas lock,
 Port, isle and pass and frith.
 And at his word leap captains bold
 Ready to do or die,
 Being himself of the race of gold,
 Equal with God most high. 110
 The dragon-light of his black eyes
 Darts awe, as to express
 The lord of mighty argosies
 And minions numberless.

So, seated in his Syrian car,
He leads 'gainst spear and pike
His sagittaries: death from far
Their wounding arrows strike.
Mescemeth none of mortal birth
That tide of men dare brave, 120
A sea that delugeth the earth,
A vast resistless wave.
No! Persia's matchless millions
No human power can quell,
Such native valour arms her sons,
Such might incomparable!
For Fate from immemorial age
Chose out her sons for power:
Bade them victorious war to wage
And breach the bastioned tower: 130
In chivalry to take delight
Where clashing squadrons close:
Kingdoms and polities the might
Of their strong arm o'erthrows.
They gaze on ocean lawns that leap
With bickering billows grey
Swept by fierce winds; their myriads sweep
Ocean's immense highway,
Where, leashed with cables fibre-fine,
Their buoyant galleys bridge 140
The rough waves of the sundering brine
From ridge to crested ridge.
And yet what man, of woman born,
Outwits the guile of God?
The pit He digs what foot may scorn,
Though with all lightness shod?
For ruin first with laughing face
Lures man into the net,
Whence never wight of mortal race
Leapt free and scatheless yet. 150
These are the thoughts that fret and fray
The sable garment of my soul.
Shall Persia's host sing, *Wellaway*,
With universal shout of dole:
Shall Susa hear, of manhood shorn?
Shall this imperial city mourn?

Yea, and shall Kissia's castle-keep
 With answering note of grief reply?
 Shall huddled women wail and weep
 Bearing the burthen to that cry, 160
 While torn in rents their raiment falls
 And tattered hang their costly shawls?

Not one is left: all they that drive
 Or ride proud steeds, all footmen stout,
 Like swarming bees that quit the hive,
 With him that leads the dance, went out;
 Shackling two shores across the sea
 They thrust a floating promontory.

But beds are wet with many a tear
 Where late the longed-for love lay warm; 170
 New luxury of grief is dear
 To our fair Persians: some mailed form
 She kissed 'Good-bye,' her love, her own,
 Each misses, left in wedlock lone.

Men of Persia, here in council, seated round this ancient roof,
 Sounding deep, for sore the need is, let us put it to the proof,
 How it fareth with King Xerxes, great Darius' golden heir,
 Lord of lieges, mighty dynast, who made Persia rich and fair;
 Whether conquest wingeth onward with the drawing of the bow
 Or the ashen-hafted spear-head crowns with victory the foe. 180
 But, behold, a light that shineth with august and godlike rays,
 Royal Mother of King Xerxes, regnant Queen of my young days;
 Rapidly her chariot rolleth; in the dust I lay me prone;
 Homage, love, and loyal duty proffer we in unison.

Enter ATOSSA.

Queen-Dowager of Persian dames deep-veiled,
 Mother of Xerxes and Darius' wife,
 Spouse of a god, and not less justly hailed
 As to one godlike authoress of life—
 Unless the power that prospered us of yore
 Now with our armies goeth out no more! 190

ATOSSA

Therefore am I come forth into the day
From golden courts and that one chamber fair
Where in my arms the great Darius lay.
My heart too feels the canker-fret of care;
Good friends, I have a story for your ears
That wakes within a train of haunting fears.

What if great wealth should scatter in his stride
The prosperous glory that Darius reared,
God being with him? Doubts new-felt divide
My mind. Possessions must not be revered
Save as men use them; yet they that have none
How poor! To them what lustre hath the sun?

200

For in themselves great riches are not wrong:
That's not my fear: but when the master's eye
Through absence fails, the thought in me is strong,
A house is blind except its lord be by.
Herein, grave sirs, interpret and advise;
In your sage counsel all my wisdom lies.

CHORUS

Be sure of this, Queen of this land of ours,
There never was nor ever can be need
To ask us twice for help by word or deed,
So far as ripe experience empowers
Leal hearts to proffer guidance: in our breast
There is no thought save how to serve thee best.

210

ATOSSA

I am much conversant with dreams at night
Since with his army my dear son is gone
To ravage and lay waste Ionia,
But nothing yet so startlingly distinct
As yesternight, as you shall forthwith hear.
For there appeared to me in bright apparel
Two women; one with Persian robes adorned,
The other in the Dorian garb; and each

220

Taller in stature than are women now,
Faultlessly fair, both sisters of one house.
The first in Hellas dwelt, by sortilege
Assigned; the other lived in Barbary.
And so it was, that in my dream methought
There was some kind of quarrel 'twixt the twain,
Which, when my dear son was apprised of it,
He would compose and make them live as friends. 230
And so he harnessed them to a chariot
Lashing their necks to the yoke. And the tall form
Clad in our raiment answered to the rein;
But the other struggled; tore the tackle up
And without bit or bridle breaking loose
Snapped the strong yoke asunder. My son fell;
And suddenly his father stood beside him,
Even Darius, sorry for his fall.
This is the vision I beheld last night.
But when I rose and in fair-flowing stream 240
Had washed my hands, so cleansed for sacrifice
I stood before an altar, purposing
To make my offering of the elements
To the Divine Forfenders, whose indeed
The office is. And, lo, an eagle fled
To Phoebus' burning brazier! Good my friends,
When I saw that I was struck dumb with fear.
And presently a falcon flew at him,
Beat him about the body with its wings,
And with its claws his proud crest-feathers plucked; 250
And strange—and passing strange—the eagle quailed
Nor dared at all retaliate. What I saw
Filled me with dread and will affright your ears.
Well do ye know that if our son succeed
He will become the wonder of the world;
And even if he fail, there is no law
Can call him to account; but unimpaired,
Life granted him, his throne is o'er this land.

CHORUS

Mother, we would not by aught we might say
Alarm unduly or raise hopes too high. 260
Better approach the gods, better go pray,
If shapes of ugly seeming haunt thine eye.

Beseech them to deliver thee from ill,
And for thyself, thy children, and the State,
And all thou lovest good things to fulfil.
This done, with drink-offerings propitiate
Earth and the dead; and then entreat thy spouse,
Darius, whom thou say'st that yesternight
Thou did'st behold, for thee and for thy house
Up from the underworld into the light
To send good luck, and adverse things blindfold
Muffle in nether darkness. Not untaught
By my prophetic soul have I made bold
To speak, convinced so best may good be sought.

270

ATOSSA

Well, come what may, my dream hath found in thee
A first expounder loyal to our son
And all our house. May fair as fair can be
Befall. I 'll get me home. All shall be done
In honour of the gods and the dear dead
That dwell beneath the earth, as thou hast said.
But, good my friends, tell me where Athens lies?

280

CHORUS

Far, far away, westwards—beyond these skies—
Where kingly Helios pales his golden fires.

ATOSSA

Is that the land that our dear son desires,
Gone on so long a chase, to make his prey?

CHORUS

Assuredly: if Athens own his sway
All Hellas must before his footstool bend.

ATOSSA

Is 't a great people? Can this Athens send
'Gainst him a numerous armament?

CHORUS

We Medes

Have cause to know their army by its deeds. 290

ATOSSA

Are they great archers then?

CHORUS

Princess, not so:
'Tis not the arrow's point, the sinewy bow,
That makes them to be feared: stand they or charge
They are close fighters with the spear and targe.

ATOSSA

What more of mark? Have they much wealth laid by?

CHORUS

A vein of silver is their treasury.

ATOSSA

Who is the ruler of this people? Who
Lord of their levies and their revenue?

CHORUS

Subject they are not unto any man:
They say 'slave' sorts not with 'Athenian.' 300

ATOSSA

Have they no master? The less likely they
To stand their ground against invaders.

CHORUS

Nay,

Darius' armament this kingless folk
For all its splendour and its numbers broke
And utterly destroyed.

ATOSSA

There 's matter here
 For anxious questionings, not without fear,
 For all whose sons went up 'gainst Athens.

CHORUS

Thou,
 O Queen, if that I err not, shalt even now
 Hear the authentic story. Here is a man
 Able to tell us how the Persians ran
 In this momentous race; and, whether good
 Or ill his tidings, he brings certitude. 310

Enter a MESSENGER.

MESSENGER

Ye habitations of broad Asia,
 And thou, O land of Persia, receipt
 Of affluent wealth, how much and how great glory
 Hath perished at a blow! Of Persian men
 The flower is fall'n and vaded! Woe is me!
 Ill is it to be the bearer of bad tidings,
 And yet, for hard necessity constrains,
 I am to cloak up nothing, Persians—tell
 The woeful tale to the end! All 's lost; the power
 Of Barbary is utterly destroyed. 320

CHORUS

O unimagined ruin, dark and drear
 And fathomlessly deep!
 Weep, men of Persia, while ye hear
 And harken while ye weep!

MESSENGER

Yea, we have fought it to a finish—I
 Thought not to see the day of my return.

CHORUS

O life! too tedious pilgrimage
To the last span outdrawn! 330
On fading eyes waxed dim with weary age
Was this dark day to dawn?

MESSENGER

Persians, the story that I have to tell
Is not a thing caught up from others' lips;
All ills prepared for our discomfiture
Myself was witness of; yea, had my share.

CHORUS

Vain, vain the arrow-blast,
The tumult of loud war!
Vain all the missiles Asia idly cast
On Hellas' fatal shore! 340

MESSENGER

The bodies of men miserably slain
Lie heaped upon the shore of Salamis
And glut full many a creek and cove thereby.

CHORUS

The bodies of the men that died
The breakers buffet, the billows beat!
Tinct with the azure of the sea-salt tide,
Rolled with the wreckage of a shattered fleet!

MESSENGER

There was no help in arrow or in bow!
Our whole fleet foundered when their warships rammed.

CHORUS

Howl! Cry aloud! Call down upon the foe 350
Ages of anguish and inexorable woe!
All evil that their hearts devised they wrought!
Mourn for the mighty host that they have brought to nought!

MESSENGER

O Salamis! thou execrable name!
Athens! My spirit mourns remembering thee!

CHORUS

Athens! for ever hateful to thy foes!
Written in memory's book for thee the record glows,
The long, long roll, past count, of them that mourn
In every Persian home husbandless and forlorn!

ATOSSA

I have kept silence long; calamity 360
Hath struck me dumb: for this surpassing grief
May not be told and stops the mouth of question.
But men must bear the troubles Heaven sends.
Compose thyself then; and this dire disaster,
Much as thou mournest it, fully unfold.
Who hath not fallen? And whom must we lament
Among the leaders of the people? Who
Of titled and of sceptred rank hath left
A gap among our noblest by his death?

MESSENGER

Xerxes himself is among the living; he 370
Beholds the light of day.

ATOSSA

A light indeed
To me and all my house! A glad day-break
After black murk of night.

MESSENGER

But Artembares,
Chief of ten thousand horse, is brayed and beat
All up and down the sharp Silenian shore.
And Dadakas, the chiliarch, struck by a spear
Dropped like an airy diver in the sea.
And Tenagon, most noble Tenagon,
True Bactrian to the core, is a wanderer now
Round Ajax' wave-washed, ocean-echoing isle. 380

Lilaëus, Arsames, and Argètes
 Fell fighting, and are ground against the rocks
 That gird the steep holm where the ring-doves breed:
 And Arcteus, neighbour once of inland streams,
 Founts of Egyptian Nilus, and Adeues,
 Yea, and Pharnuchus, weighted with the load
 Of ponderous armour—three from out one ship—
 Plunged overboard. The Chrysian Matallus,
 Lord of ten thousand fighting men, went down.
 And he who marshalled thirty thousand horse, 390
 All black, his dark, flame-coloured, bushy beard
 Dyed gules in his own gore. The Arabian
 Magus, and Artames the Bactrian,
 Far from the rough, stern land he chose for home,
 Perished in those disastrous seas. There sank
 Amistris; and Amphistreus cast away
 His spear. And Ariomardus, good as brave,
 To the great grief of Sardis met his death.
 And Seisames the Mysian is slain:
 And Tharubis, of five times fifty ships 400
 Grand Admiral—he was Lernaean-born
 And beautiful withal—is lost. Alack!
 He gave his life in an unlucky cause.
 The bravest of the brave, Syennesis,
 Generalissimo of the Cilicians,
 A man whose splendid valour cost more blood
 To the enemy than any single foe,
 Died gloriously. Thus much have I told
 Touching the captains of the host. And now
 Some few disasters, where they came in crowds, 410
 I will relate.

ATOSSA

This is the very crown
 And summit of all sorrow. For proud Persia
 Direst humiliation: shriek on shriek
 Shall follow on thy news. But retrace thy steps;
 Tell me how many sail the Hellenes had
 That they dared close upon the Persian power
 And ram us ship for ship.

MESSENGER

Ah, had it lain

With numbers to decide, be well assured
 Victory had crowned the fleet of Barbary!
 The whole Hellenic navy was no more 420
 Than ten divisions of thirty sail apiece,
 And but a tithe of them in the fighting-line!
 Xerxes, it is a point within my knowledge,
 Went into action with a thousand sail:
 Two hundred ships and seven of high speed
 Is the reputed reckoning. Accuse us not
 That in this fight we failed to play the man:
 A God it was who broke our power, weighed down
 The judgment scale with no impartial hand.
 There are divinities that keep the realm 430
 Of divine Pallas safe.

ATOSSA

Is Athens safe?

Is not the city sacked?

MESSENGER

Ah, but her men!

They live, and therefore her defence is sure.

ATOSSA

Tell me how first the fleets encountered; who
 Began the attack, the Hellenes or my son
 Exulting in the number of his ships?

MESSENGER

Princess, the first beginner of all the woes
 That afterwards ensued, though whence he came
 None knoweth, was some genius of wrath,
 Some wicked spirit such as lures men on 440
 To their destruction. There came a man,
 A Hellene, from the Athenian host, and he
 On this wise spake unto Xerxes, thy son—
 'If there shall come a dusk and darksome night

The Hellenes will not tarry; leaping down
Upon their rowers' benches they will pull
For safety, hither, thither scattering
In secret flight.' And when thy son heard that
He instantly—perceiving not the guile
Of the Hellene nor the spite of jealous Gods—
Made known to all the captains of his ships
That when the burning sun should cease to beam
Across the world, and glimmering twilight took
The court and curtilage of serene air,
The main armada must disperse and form
Three squadrons line abreast, blocking the exits
And narrow channels where the salt waves churn:
The residue to compass Ajax' Isle.
Then, if the Hellenes turned to flee from doom
By privily withdrawing in the dark,
Not one could get away, but their whole fleet
Must fall into our hands. So spake the king
In sanguine mood, with not the least surmise
Of the divine purpose, presently fulfilled.
And not at all in any disarray
But with a disciplined obedience,
They made their dinner ready, every seaman
Lashing his oar-shank to the well-turned thole;
And when the sun waxed dim and night came on,
Each master oarsman went aboard his ship
And every captain of the fighting crews,
And down the long lines of those ships of war
Squadron to squadron spake right cheerily,
Hailing each other; not a ship of them
Lost her allotted station; and all night
The captains kept them cruising to and fro.
And night passed, and the Hellenic armament
Made no attempt to steal away unseen.
But when with her white horses day shone fair
And overspread the broad and ample earth,
There rose and rang from the Hellenic host
A roar of voices musical with psalms,
And loudly from the island precipices
Echo gave back an answering cheer. Thereat
Seeing their judgment grievously at fault,
Fear fell on the barbarians. Not for flight

Did the Hellenes then chant that inspiring hymn,
But resolutely going into battle,
Whereto the trumpet set all hearts on fire.
The word was given, and, instantaneously, 490
Oars smote the roaring waves in unison
And churned the foam up. Soon their whole fleet appeared;
The port division thrown out like a horn
In precise order; then the main of them
Put out against us. We could plainly hear
The thunder of their shouting as they came.
'Forth, sons of Hellas! free your land, and free
Your children and your wives, the native seats
Of Gods your fathers worshipped and their graves.
This is a bout that hazards all ye have.' 500
And verily from us in the Persian tongue
There rose an answering roar; the long suspense
Was ended. In an instant, ship smote ship,
With thrust of armoured prow. The first to ram
Was a Greek; that impact carried clean away
A tall Phoenician's poop. Then all came on,
Each steering forthright for a ship of ours.
At first the encountering tide of Persians held;
But caught in the narrows, crowded without sea-room,
None could help other; nay, they fell aboard 510
Their own ships, crashing in with beak of bronze,
Till all their oars were smashed. But the Hellenes
Rowed round and round, and with sure seamanship
Struck where they chose. Many of ours capsized,
Until the very sea was hid from sight
Choked up with drifting wreckage and drowning men.
The beaches and low rocks were stacked with corpses:
The few barbarian vessels still afloat,
Fouling each other fled in headlong rout.
But they with broken oars and splintered spars 520
Beat us like tunnies or a draught of fish,
Yea, smote men's backs asunder; and all the while
Shrieking and wailing hushed the ocean surge,
Till night looked down and they were rapt away.
But, truly, if I should discourse the length
Of ten long days I could not sum our woes.
There never yet 'twixt sunrise and sunset
Perished so vast a multitude of men.

ATOSSA

Woe! woe! An ocean of calamity
Hath broke on Persia and all Barbary. 530

MESSENGER

But this is not the half. A grief ensued
So heavy, its forerunner kicks the beam.

ATOSSA

Oh, can misfortune come in hatefuller shape?
What spite of malice adverse to our host
Sweeps through some more immeasurable arc
The moving finger that metes out our woes?

MESSENGER

The prime of Persian manhood, men who had
True greatness in their souls, illustrious born,
And ever among the first in the king's trust,
Died miserably a most inglorious death. 540

ATOSSA

Good friends, was ever woman so accursed
With evil fortune? Tell me how they died.

MESSENGER

There is an island opposite the shores
Of Salamis, a little, wretched isle,
With never a safe cove where ships may ride,
But Pan, who loves the choric dance, haunts there,
Footing it lightly on the wave-washed strand.
Thither the king dispatched them, with intent
That when the enemy, forced to abandon ship,
Sought safety on that isle, they might with ease 550
Put all the host of Hellas to the sword,
And rescue their own comrades from the salt
Sea-friths. But he judged ill the event. For when
The Gods the glory of the sea-fight gave
Unto the Hellenes, armed to the teeth they sprang
Ashore and compassed the whole island round,

So that they knew not where to turn. And many
 They battered to death with stones: some they shot dead
 With arrows: finally, to make an end,
 Rushed in and finished off their butcher's work, 560
 Hacking their helpless victims limb from limb,
 Until not one of them was left alive.
 And Xerxes, when he saw that depth beyond
 All depths of sorrow, wailed aloud. For he sat
 Upon a throne conspicuous to the host,
 On a high hill beside the open sea.
 There with rent robes and a heart-piercing cry
 Straightway he gave the signal to his troops
 Drawn up upon the shore and let them go
 In wild, disordered flight. This further stroke 570
 Of fortune's malice fell for thee to mourn.

ATOSSA

O wicked spirit! How did'st thou beguile
 Our Persians' hearts! How bitter a revenge
 Upon illustrious Athens was vouchsafed
 To our dear son! Not all that Barbary lost
 Beforetime on the field of Marathon
 Sufficed! But, thinking to repay in kind
 All that we suffered there, he hath drawn on
 A deluge of immeasurable woe!
 But tell me of the ships that 'scaped destruction, 580
 Where did'st thou leave these? Hast sure news of them?

MESSENGER

The captains of the remnant hoisted sail
 And ran before the wind, a rabble rout.
 But the remainder of our army perished
 In the Boeotian country, some of thirst
 For lack of solace of refreshing springs.
 We that were left, taking no time to breathe,
 Crossed into Phocis and the Locrian land
 And the Maliac gulf where the Spercheius flows
 Watering a broad plain with his gracious stream. 590
 Achaia and the Thessalian cities then
 Opened to us their gates, but we were sore
 Straitened for lack of meat. And there the most

Perished of thirst and hunger, for, God wot,
We must contend with both. Anon we came
To the Magnesian country and the coasts
Of Macedonia by the Axian frith
And Bolbe's reedy marshes and the range
Pangaean—country of Edonia.

And on that very night God caused a frost
Out of due season: Strymon's holy stream
Was frozen over. And many, that heretofore
Denied the Gods, thanked heaven upon their knees,
Yea, bowed themselves to earth and sky. And when
They had made an end of calling on the Gods
The host began to cross on the firm ice.

And whoso crossed before the beams of God
Were scattered wide, reached safety. But anon
The round, bright sun with blazing rays of fire
Made right across the stream a waterway,
Thawing the midst thereof with glowing heat.

And then they fell in heaps: he happiest
Who soonest gasped away the breath of life.
All that were left, all that had won to safety,
Crossed Thrace and in the teeth of fearful hardships,
That desperate retreat accomplished, came—
But they were few indeed—to their own home.

Behold these things are merest truth: but much
I leave unsaid; many and grievous woes
The wrath of God hurled down upon our host.

[Exit MESSENGER.]

CHORUS

Spirit whose dispensation is too hard,
Thou hast set a heavy foot upon our necks,
Ground Persia in the dust!

ATOSSA

My heart is sick;
I mourn a vanished host! Visions of the night
How plainly ye portended woe! And you,
How fondly ye interpreted my dream!
Natheless, since here at least your oracle
Fails not, I will go pray, first to the Gods;

Then I will take the sacred elements—
 Offerings to earth, oblations to the dead— 630
 And come to you again. Things past I know;
 But I would fain inquire if what 's to come
 Promises better fortune. Lend your aid:
 With men of trust true counsel take, I charge ye;
 And, if our son return in the meantime,
 Console him and escort him to our house,
 Lest that on woe there follow further woe.

[*Exit ATOSSA.*

CHORUS

O Zeus, thou art king! There is none thee beside!
 Thou hast shattered our host and humbled our pride!
 Thou hast darkened with grief the light of thy day 640
 O'er Susa and Ecbatana!
 They have rent their thin veils, their kerchiefs, thread-drawn,
 Our delicate mourners; their wimples of lawn
 They have drenched with salt tears; the young wife newly wed
 Looks out for her lord, but he comes not; her bed,
 Laid soft with fair linen, where love had his bliss,
 Standeth vacant; cold sorrow their banqueter is;
 But they rise up an-hungered, though they sit long;
 And I too o'er the fallen would utter my song.

CHORAL HYMN

This earth, this Asia, wide as east from west, 650
 Mourns—empty—of her manhood dispossessed.
 Xerxes the King led forth his war-array!
 Xerxes the King hath cast his host away!
 Xerxes the King (Oh King unwise!)
 Steered in the wake of doom his orient argosies!
 How fell it that Darius, lord of the bow.
 In Susa long ago,
 Fair fortune had? That then
 He who ruled Persia won the hearts of men?

The ships, the swarthy ships, with brow of gloom 660
 And wide wings woven on the weary loom,
 Landsmen and mariners haled to that far shore!
 The ships, the black ships whelmed them evermore!

They struck, they split, they filled,
They sank: and, oh, death's throes Ionian vengeance stilled.
And now by plain and pass, rude, wild, and bare,
 In the frore Thracian air,
 After long wandering,
Scarce 'scaped with life, comes home our lord the King.

But they on that wild water, 670
Firstlings of death and slaughter,
Roam, where the long waves lash Kychrean sands;
Roam, but no wave shall lift them,
Nor ebb nor flood-tide drift them
To this dear earth beloved above all lands.
 Wide as the sky, and deep
 As those dark waters sweep,
Wail! let grief gnaw your heart, and wring your hands!

Combed with no tender combing, 680
Where angry waves break foaming,
Children of Ocean's unpolluted tide
Flesh their dumb mouths, and tear
The dead men once so fair:
Old eyes are wet whose tears Time long since dried;
The sire weeps his lost son,
The home its goodman gone,
And all the woeful tale is bruited far and wide.

They pay no more tribute; they bow them no more!
The word of power is not spoken 690
By the princes of Persia; their day is o'er,
And the laws of the Medes are broken
Through Asia's myriad-peopled land;
For the staff is snapped in the King's right hand.

And a watch is not set on the free, frank tongue,
Yea, liberty's voice speaks loud;
And the yoke is loosed from the neck that was wrung
And the back to dominion bowed:
For the earth of Ajax' isle is red
With the blood of Persia's noble dead!

Enter ATOSSA.

ATOSSA

Good friends, the heart that hath found trouble knows 700
That when calamity is at the flood
We shake at shadows; but, if once the tide
Flow fair, and fortune send a prospering wind,
We cannot think that it will change. To me
All prayers I offer now are full of dread,
And voices loud, but not with victory,
Sound in mine ears; so fell a stroke of fortune
Dismays my soul. Therefore am I returned,
Not as of late with chariots and with pomp;
I bring libations due from son to sire, 710
Meet for propitiation; gifts that please
Dead bodies in their graves. Milk, white and pure,
And crystal honey cropped from bee-searched flowers,
And cool cups drawn from virgin founts; and here,
Pressed from wild nature's bosom, is strong wine,
The jocund youngling of an ancient stem;
And I have oil of olive, amber-clear,
Sweet essence of a never-fading tree,
And wreathed blossoms—children all of earth
That yieldeth every fruit. Then, dear my friends, 720
Accompany with song acceptable
These luscious draughts that soothe the silent dead,
And forth from his sepulchral monument
Call up Darius' spirit. The cup earth drinks
I will pour out to the Gods of the underworld.

CHORUS

Queen of Persia, chief in worth,
'Neath the chambers of the earth,
Send thy rich libations streaming;
We with prayers of holy seeming
Will beseech the dead that there 730
They may find acceptance fair.
Gods infernal, pure and holy,
Earth and Hermes, melancholy
Lord of death and gloom and night,
Send his soul up to the light.

He will heal—point undismayed
Where grief's far horizons fade.

CHORAL HYMN

Peer of the Gods, whose kingly state
Is evermore felicity!
Shifting as the shocks of fate 740
Sinks and soars our endless cry
Uttered in an ancient tongue:
Hearest thou the shades among?

All ye gods of souls earth-bound,
Hearken! Earth, break up thy sod!
Grant us sight from thy dark ground
Of Susa's son and Persia's god!
To such an ample spirit ne'er
Persian earth gave sepulchre.

Dear was the man; dear is his burial-mound! 750
A power sleeps here, whose influence shall not fade!
Oh, where he sits sole King 'mong Kings disrowned,
Aidoneus, dim Aidoneus, speed Darius' shade!

In wantonness of heart he ne'er made war,
Nor lost a world wasting the lives of men;
They hailed him their God-given counsellor;
God-given he was, and great was Persia's glory then.

Old majesty! Great Padishah!
Come forth, and from thy barrow high,
Show the white plume of thy tiar, 760
Thy buskin dipped in crocus-dye!
Unclouded spirit, morning-clear,
King—Sire—Darius! reappear!

Griefs thy glory never knew,
Lord of our Lord, thy coming stay.
A mist hath fallen of Stygian hue;
Persia's youth is cast away!
Unclouded spirit, morning-clear,
King—Sire—Darius! reappear!

Thou, whose passing nations wept, 770
 Wherefore hath ambition swept
 Worlds that thou didst hold in fee,
 Empire, awe, and admiralty,
 In one headlong ruin borne?
 Ships perfidious, ships foresworn,
 Crewless, oarless, scallop-scaled,
 Ye your pride to Hellas veiled,
 Hidden from the sight of suns
 That gild her golden galleons!

[The Ghost of DARIUS ascends from his tomb.]

DARIUS

Trusty and well-beloved! Comrades of mine 780
 When we were young together; now most grave
 Signors of Persia, what afflicts the realm?
 Earth groans and jars and frets with fevered pulse;
 I see my consort standing by my tomb,
 And verily I am afraid. Withal,
 The cup of kind remembrance, poured in prayer,
 I have received. And ye make lamentation
 Beside my sepulchre in such shrill key
 As calls up spirits: yea, with piteous cries
 Summon me from my grave; and wayleave thence 790
 Is hard to come by; for the infernal Gods
 Love better to hold fast than to let go.
 Nevertheless, with them have I prevailed,
 And ye behold me! Haste! my time is short
 And I would not offend. What aileth Persia?
 What strange, what heavy stroke hath smitten her?

CHORUS

I dare not meet thy gaze: I fear
 To speak what must offend thine ear;
 With veiled eyes, I bow me prone,
 As at the footstool of thy throne! 800

DARIUS

Know that by strong persuasion of thy grief
 I am ascended from the shades. Be brief;
 Put awe and forms of courtly speech away,
 And utter boldly all thou hast to say.

CHORUS

Thou askest speech of me, and I
Fear to do that courtesy;
At thy bidding to impart
Tidings which must grieve thy heart.

DARIUS

Since thine old awe is not to be enforced,
Good Queen, dear partner death alone divorced 810
From spousal joys, though thee the touch of age
Hath changed to outward view, this grief assuage,
These sobs and tears give o'er: take courage then
To speak but one clear word to me; for men
Cast in the mould of frail humanity
Are heirs to all its ills: by land and sea
Evils a-many are reserved for man,
If that Time lengthen out his little span.

ATOSSA

O of mankind the happiest by far,
While thou didst yet behold the day's bright star, 820
How enviable in thy life wast thou!
How like a god thy days were passed. And now
I envy thee in death: yea, count it bliss
Not to have lived to search the black abyss,
The bottomless pit of sorrow. Dear my lord,
Darius, to sum all in one brief word;
Persia lies waste—a kingdom desolate!

DARIUS

Speak'st thou of plague and famine! Or is the state
By rancour of domestic faction rent?

ATOSSA

Nothing of this; her mighty armament 830
Hath suffered ruin round the Athenian coast.

DARIUS

Tell me; what son of mine led forth our host?

ATOSSA

Impetuous Xerxes: and to fill his train
Emptied of manhood Asia's vasty plain.

DARIUS

And on this rash attempt, of folly born,
Went he by land or sea?

ATOSSA

With either horn,
Broadening the thrust of his battle-front, he planned
A double enterprise by sea and land.

DARIUS

How found he means o'er all the realms that lie
'Twixt us and Hellas, plains and mountains high,
To launch on foot an armament so vast?

840

ATOSSA

A yoke on Helle's stormy frith he cast
And made a causeway through the unruly sea.

DARIUS

A giant's toil to shut with lock and key
The wrathful Bosphorus!

ATOSSA

The thing was done!
Methinks, an unseen power helped our son.

DARIUS

A power of might indeed to send him mad!

ATOSSA

Ay, since the achievement evil issue had!

DARIUS

What fate hath foiled our arms that ye make moan
For fallen men?

ATOSSA

The fleet is overthrown
And in its ruin whelmed the host on shore. 850

DARIUS

Then hath my people perished? Hath grim war
Ta'en toll of all?

ATOSSA

Yea, Susa lieth bare,
And mourns her perished youth, her manhood fair.

DARIUS

Oh, the lost levies! Oh, the bright array
Of proud confederate peoples!

ATOSSA

Bactria
Through all her clans and Egypt's commonalty
For children lost lift up a bitter cry.

DARIUS

Calamitous adventurer! thine emprise
Hath drained the very sap of thine allies! 860

ATOSSA

Xerxes, a lonely man, that few attend,
They say——

DARIUS

What say they? Draws he to an end
Of his long march? And hath he haply found
Some place of safety?

ATOSSA

Yea, the stormy sound
And the long bridge that spans the sundering sea,
Which when he hailed a happy man was he!

DARIUS

So, he hath crossed the strait and touched the strand
And journeys delicately through the land
Of Asia—or thou hast heard things false and smooth?

ATOSSA

None challengeth these tidings; they are clear truth 870
And beyond cavil.

DARIUS

Ah, with how swift stride
Hath come fulfilment of things prophesied!
How on my son hath Zeus in anger sent
The end foretold, which my fears did prevent!
For long ago I knew the Gods would speed
The final consummation of that rede,
And when man, shod with haste and girt with pride,
Beckons his own doom, God is on his side.
And now, methinks, to all men of good will
The fount lies bare whence flowed this broadening ill; 880
But the event my son too rashly wrought
In the blind arrogance of childish thought.
He dreamed that he could chain, as men chain slaves,
The holy haste of Hellespontine waves,
God's flowing Bosphorus; another measure
Presumed to teach its billows, at his pleasure
Bound them in linkèd fetters hammered fast,
Yea, made a highway, where his army passed.
A mortal man on all the Gods that be
He ventured war; the lordship of the sea, 890
Poseidon's realm (he judged so much amiss),
Challenged and thought to quell. And was not this
The very madness of a mind diseased?
Prosperity and power and wealth, which eased
The lives of men, my long reign's rich reward,
Is plunder now for some freebooter's sword!

ATOSSA

All this impetuous Xerxes, overruled
By evil men, in their rash counsel schooled,
Learned; for they taught him that thy valour won
Great opulence and wide dominion 900
For thy succeeding heirs; and 'twas a taunt
Of theirs that he at home was valiant,
But with new wealth no wise increased thy store:
And so detraction oft-repeated bore
Ill fruit: to doom the readiest way he went
And against Hellas launched his armament.

DARIUS

And in all truth the thing that he hath done
Is great in consequence, in memory
Never to be forgotten: such a fall
From power and glory, such a grievous loss 910
Ne'er yet made Susa empty, since the day
When first King Zeus assigned her pride of place,
Centring in one man dominion
Over all Asia rich in fleece and flock,
The staff of Empire steady in his hand.
It was a Mede that mastered first her hosts;
His son completed that which he began,
For wisdom laid her hand upon the helm
And caution tempered daring. Third from him
Reigned Cyrus, blest in all he undertook. 920
He with all friendly powers established peace
On firm foundations. His arm was stretched
Over the land of Lydia, and he
Made Phrygia vassal; all Ionia
He drave before him with the reins of power;
Neither provoked he God to jealous wrath,
So amiable and gracious were his ways.
And Cyrus' fourth son set the host in order;
But the fifth, Mardus, reigning in his stead,
Brought upon fatherland and monarchy 930
Shame and reproach. And him by subtle craft
Artaphrenes, an honourable man,
Slew in the palace, powerfully helped

By friends resolved upon the deed. And chance
Placed on my head the crown I coveted.
And with great armies I waged many wars,
But ne'er in such calamity involved
The realm: and now Xerxes, my son, because
His thoughts are a young man's thoughts, remembers not
My precepts: for I call ye all to witness, 940
Friends and coevals, not a man of us
Had ever by misuse of so much power
Made it the instrument of so great a woe.

CHORUS

O King Darius, whither tends the scope
Of thy discourse? What may we thence conclude?
How may this land of Persia best emerge
From these sore trials and yet see good days?

DARIUS

Wage no more wars 'gainst Hellas, wage no more,
Not though the Medic power were mightier yet;
For verily her soil is her ally. 950

CHORUS

How say'st thou 'her ally'? How can her soil
Take arms for her and fight upon her side?

DARIUS

The power of numbers, be they ne'er so vast,
She wears away by famine.

CHORUS

Few and choice
Shall be the muster, with all manner store
Plentifully provided.

DARIUS

They that are left
In Hellas even now shall not escape
Nor see their homes again.

CHORUS

What hast thou said!

Doth not the armament of Barbary
March out of Europe over Helle's sound? 960

DARIUS

Few out of many, if the oracles
Of Heaven, by warrant of these late events,
Gain credence: they are individable;
They do not fail in part, nor yet in part
Are they fulfilled. And even were they flawed
With false predictions, Xerxes, in false hopes
Confiding, hath abandoned to their fate
A vast array, the chosen of his host.
Where the Asopus watereth the plain
And maketh fat the deep Boeotian earth 970
They are cut off; and there is reserved for them
The culmination of their sufferings,
A just reward of pride and godless thoughts,
Because in Hellas they thought it no shame
To strip the ancient statues of the Gods
And burn their temples: yea, cast down the altars,
And from their firm foundations overthrew,
So that they lie in heaps, the builded fanes
Of unseen powers. The evil that they did
Is in like measure meted unto them, 980
Yea, and more shall be meted; deeper still
Lies the hid vein of suffering; yet a little
And it shall gush forth. So great shall be the carnage;
A veritable offering of blood,
Congealed with slaughter, on Plataea's plain,
The dark oblation of the Dorian spear.
High as are heaped the sands their carcasses
Shall be hereafter, even to sons' sons,
A silent witness for whoso hath eyes,
That proud thoughts are not for the worm called man; 990
For pride in blossom, like an ear of corn,
Swells and grows ripe with ruin reaped in tears.
Ye, when ye see these things and think thereon,
Remember Athens and remember Hellas!
Let none of you, that fortune, which is yours!

And which God gave, disdaining, set your hearts
On what ye have not, neither in getting more
Pour out like water vast prosperity.

Zeus is a chastener of froward wills

And he correcteth with a heavy hand.

1000

Wherefore be ye instructors of your lord,

And with well-reasoned admonitions teach him

To have a humbler heart and cast away

The sin of pride, for it offendeth God.

And, Xerxes' dear and venerable Mother,

Return to the palace; bring forth fitting raiment

And go therewith to meet thy son: for all

About him, torn by grief, in tatters hangs

The ravelment of his rich-embroidered robe.

Moreover comfort him with gentle words;

1010

Thee only will he hearken. I go hence

Descending through the darkness of the earth.

Farewell, grave elders; in adversity

Find out the soul's true solace day by day;

Where dead men lie wealth nothing profiteth.

[The Ghost of DARIUS descends into the tomb.]

CHORUS

Griefs many, woes that Barbary now endures

And shall endure hereafter wring my heart.

ATOSSA

O Fate, how endless is the train of sorrow

That entereth my soul! But there's no pang

That gnaws with keener tooth than picturing

1020

My son, his royal person clothed with shame

And trappings of dishonour. I will hence

And take me handsome robes and make essay

To meet him. In the hour of evil fortune

We'll not be false to all we hold most dear.

[Exit ATOSSA.]

CHORAL HYMN

All of earth's fullness was ours, all the spacious

Amplitude life yields or law can uphold,

When the unvanquished, the griefless, all-gracious,
Godlike Darius ruled Persia of old.

Glory of conquest and gift of good order 1030
His statutes bestowed and our armies achieved;
Joyous and fresh they came back to our border,
In strength unexhausted, with triumph received.

What commonwealths he captive took
And never once his home forsook
Nor Halys' river passed;
Daughters of Acheloan race,
Where thunder on the shores of Thrace
Strymonian billows vast.
Beyond the marshes stretched his power, 1040
The shadow of a fenced tower
Flung wide o'er Helle's path;
It fell on cities fair that line
Propontis' inlet lacustrine
And stormy Pontus' strath.

His were the surf-beaten islands hard by us,
Where the thrust of the land lifts the wave-flung spray;
Lesbos and Paros and Naxos and Chios
And Samos, with oil of her olive-groves grey;
Myconus's earth paid toll to Darius; 1050
Tenos-by-Andros acknowledged his sway.

Far from both shores, where the waters divide us,
Clasped in the mid-sea's ambient kiss,
Lemnos and Icarus' isle and Cnidus,
Paphos, Rhodes, Soloe were minions of his;
And thy namesake—thy parent—O thou, whose waves hide us,
Mother of mourning, Salamis!

The portion of Javan a wise moderation
Bound to his throne by her people's decrees;
Weariless then was the might of our nation; 1060
Countless the swarm of her mercenaries;
But now in the day of God's sore visitation
We are tamed and chastised with the stripes of strong seas.

Enter XERXES.

XERXES

My fate is upon me;
My star hath declined;
A grief hath undone me;
A doom none divined

Hath broken the sceptre of Persia as a reed that is snapped in
the wind.

Age, thine eyes chide me;
They bow down my head;
My strength is denied me;
My limbs are as lead.

1070

Would God I lay fallen in battle, covered up out of sight with
the dead!

CHORUS

Lord of our splendour,
Our goodly array;
Despoiler and spender
And caster-away

Of thy host; God hath cut off thy lieges and darkened the light
of thy day.

And Persia, their mother,
Mourns them that fell:
She, she, and none other,
Acclaimeth thee well,

1080

King Xerxes, that gorged with her children the maw and the
belly of Hell!

The pride and the power of her
Thou hast brought low:
Count the fallen flower of her,
Lords of the bow,

Reckon a myriad-muster, 'twere ten times ten thousand, I
trow.

Sad lord of lost legions,
Sorrow on thee!
Through Asia's wide regions
Thy welcome shall be

1090

Lamentation and mourning and weeping: she stoopeth; she
boweth the knee.

XERXES

Wail loud! Be not dumb!
On me be your moan!
For I am become
To kingdom and throne

A plague and a curse; yea, a burden, a weariness unto my
own.

CHORUS

O crowned desolation,
Whose stripes thy land bears;
A sore salutation
She sounds in thy ears;

1100

Mariandyné's death-lament hails thee: the cup of thy feasting
is tears.

XERXES

Pour forth thy sorrow!
Long, long shall it flow!
Nor to-day nor to-morrow
Sufficeth thy woe.

I have felt the fierce changes of fortune; the blast of God's
vengeance I know.

CHORUS

Fraught with awe for thy fate
My weeping shall be;
Whelmed 'neath the weight
Of the weltering sea

1110

I am fain to wail forth my lament for thy realm and thy house
and for thee!

XERXES

Ionia's embattled might,
Ionia's men-of-war,
In Ares' fatal armour dight,
Spurred by the foaming oar,
Swept men, ships, honour, all, away:
And there was left the wild waves' play
Heard in the lone of loveless night
On that disastrous shore.

1120

CHORUS

Woe! Woe! thrice woe!

XERXES

Inquire of me and ask all ye are fain to know.

CHORUS

Where, where is that great multitude,
Leal vassals of thy throne,
Pharandaces, Agabatas,
Susas and Pelagon?
Oh, tell me where is Psammis?
Where is Susiskanes,
Who from Ecbatana rode forth—
And Dotamas?

1130

XERXES

All these

Aboard a ship of Tyre
Perished. Where cold waves close
Above the wreck of lost empire
I left them with their foes:
The beaded bubbles hush and hiss,
The strong tide ebbs and flows,
Bruised on the beach at Salamis,
The waves that break on Salamis
Scourge them with bitter blows.

1140

CHORUS

Woe! Woe! thrice woe! But tell me,
Pharnuchus, where is he?
Ariomardus and Seualkes
Whose fief was a king's fee?
And hast thou lost Lilaeus,
Sprung from a noble strain?
And Tharubis and Memphis,
Are they among the slain?
Artembares, Hystaechmas—
For them my heart is fain.

1150

XERXES

Woe! Woe! thrice woe!
These many found one overthrow!
Their eyes all dim with coming death
They fixed on Athens, old, diluvial birth
Of Hate; inland on her detested earth
They gasped away their breath.

CHORUS

A Persian of the Persians,
The very eye of thee,
Who mustered men by thousands ten
Alpistus, where is he?
The son of Batanochus,
The son of Sesamas,
The son of Megabates;
Parthus and Oibaras,
Art thou returned without them?
And will they come no more?
And lie they there forsaken
On that disastrous shore?
Alas! what need of language?
The trouble of thy face
Proclaims this woe beyond all woes
To Persia's sceptred race!

1160

1170

XERXES

Wring not my heart! Rouse not again
That insupportable refrain
For friends cut off and comrades slain.
Though sharp your pang and shrill your cry of dole
There is a louder voice that wails within my soul.

CHORUS

But many, many more I miss!
Xanthes of Mardian clans
Chieftain; and Anchaes, who led 1180
The valiant Arians;
And Arsames and Diaexis,
Lords of the lordly steed,
And Dadacas and Lythimnas,
And Tolmus good at need,
A greedy fighter fell to fill
With the red meat of war;
I marvel that they follow not
Thy crimson-curtained car.

XERXES

All, all have gone the darkling way 1190
With that great host they led!

CHORUS

All, all are gone the darkling way
Down to the unmemoried dead!

XERXES

Forbear! This stabs me to the heart!

CHORUS

O unseen power, whoe'er thou art,
Thou hast hurled down a gleaming woe,
Bright ruin's ghastly meteor-glow!

XERXES

A stroke hath fallen resonant
To the last beat of time.

CHORUS

A stroke hath fallen resonant
To earth's remotest clime.

1200

XERXES

O strange, new pang! Sharp agony!

CHORUS

Ionia, mistress of the sea
We struck under an evil star;
Yea, Persia hath ill-hap in war!

XERXES

So great a host, and all are gone!
And I am left, a thing men look upon
And weep and wail!

CHORUS

O royal Persian!
What hast thou not lost?

XERXES

Nay, behold and see
Of sumptuous superfluity
The poor remains: the remnant left to me!

1210

CHORUS

Yea, yea; thou hast lost ships, men, gear——

XERXES

But worse remains: all Persia's power is here,
Clapped in the compass of an arrow-case!

CHORUS

Ye gods, into how little space
Is crept thy treasure still unspent!

XERXES

Yet in this quiver there is room enough
To hold the relics of my armament.

CHORUS

Of bag and baggage, store and stuff,
Artillery and equipage, O King, 1220
Hast thou brought back safe home this despicable thing?

XERXES

All weapons else wherewith we went arrayed,
All power, and every necessary aid
That armies fight with, have been stripped away!

CHORUS

Alack! the sons of Javan fly not from a fray!

XERXES

They take too much delight in war!
These eyes beheld a grief they looked not for.

CHORUS

Thy great armada, thy long battle-line
Broken——

XERXES

When I saw that such grief was mine
From hem to hem my robe I rent. 1230

CHORUS

O God!

XERXES

Cry loud with all lament!
Yea, the whole almonry of sorrow drain!
No amplest 'O' can this large ill contain.

CHORUS

I feel a twofold, yea, a threefold chain,
And every link a fiery pain,
Constrict my heart.

XERXES

Yea, we must weep
And we must put on sackcloth; but the foe
On this dark anniversary shall keep
Pastime and sport, highday and holiday.

CHORUS

And all thy strength and all thy bright array——

1240

XERXES

Lo! I fled naked: none escorts me home——

CHORUS

And all thy friends and comrades cast away!
The waters of calamity flow deep;
They break in death and ruin; and they sweep
Wrecks of the wrath of God in their tumultuous foam.

XERXES

Weep blood! Yea, with sharp nail
The lank and hollow cheek of dotage tear,
Then each man to his house.

CHORUS

Weep! Wail!

XERXES

Anon with me the burthen bear!

CHORUS

Shriek for shriek and groan for groan,
In miserable antiphone!

1250

XERXES

Shrill forth your loud lament in unison.

XERXES AND CHORUS

Woe! Woe! Woe! Woe!

CHORUS

O grief the heaviest of all
To hear my lord the King's voice wailing his downfall!

XERXES

Weep on, weep on for the King's sake;
Thy woeful service neither stint nor spare!

CHORUS

Eyes must be wet or hearts will break.

XERXES

Anon with me the burthen bear.

CHORUS

Lord, I am ready to obey.

1260

XERXES

Wail and weep with wellaway!

CHORUS

Wellaway! And wellaway!

XERXES AND CHORUS

Woe! Woe! Woe!

CHORUS

This mingled cup is mine and thine,
Foamed with the ferment of a black and bitter wine.

XERXES

Beat thy breast and wail
The Mysian wail!

CHORUS

Oh, wail!

XERXES

Spare not thy silvery hairs;
Pluck out the reverend beard upon thy chin!

CHORUS

I spare them not whom no grief spares.

1270

XERXES

Renew, renew thy cry! Begin
With mine your voices blending,
Let sorrow have no ending!

CHORUS

Sorrow, sorrow hath no ending.

XERXES

Rend thine ample train!

CHORUS

Behold! 'tis rent in twain!

XERXES

Touch the hair-strung lute
And teach it sorrow for my power laid low!

CHORUS

All mournful music else be dumb and mute,
That shrill lament shall ever flow!

1280

XERXES

To-day and every morrow
Let fall the rain of sorrow.

CHORUS

To-day shall have a rainy morrow.

XERXES

Now with me the burthen bear!

CHORUS

Woe! Woe! Woe!

XERXES

And whence ye came with footstep slow
And cry of wail and weeping go.

CHORUS

Woe! Woe! Woe!

XERXES

Through all the city let your voice be sent!

129 c

CHORUS

Through all the city one lament.

XERXES

Groan, ye who did so delicately tread!

CHORUS

O Persian earth, I stumble on your dead!

XERXES

Yea, yea, yea!

In the oared galleys they were cast away!

CHORUS

My groanings shall thine escort be!
I'll play thee home with such sad minstrelsy!

[*Exeunt.*

THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES

(467 B.C.)

NOTES

THE PLAY. The trilogy to which this drama belonged was preceded by *Laius* and *Oedipus*. Its attendant satyric piece, *The Sphinx*, is also lost. Here again the plot remains simple; and although the opening is no longer spoken by the chorus, half the play is lyrical and the main action is recited by a messenger. Two interesting points call for notice. In lines 597-608 we have the first example of *dianoia* or general reflection upon life (page 118). There is also a new effort at character-drawing, which some critics attribute to the influence of Sophocles, who had won the tragic prize in the previous year.

THE LEGEND. Laius, King of Thebes, having indulged an unnatural lust, was warned by the Delphic oracle that he would perish by the hand of his own son. Accordingly, when Oedipus was born, the infant was exposed on Mount Cithaeron. The story of Oedipus' misfortunes is too well known to need repetition here. His ill-treatment at the hands of his two sons Eteocles and Polynices led him to pronounce a curse, as a result of which they were to 'divide their inherited land by steel.' In order to avoid this disaster, they agreed to rule by turns, changing places annually; and the one who for the time being did not occupy the throne should leave the country. At the end of Eteocles' first year he refused to abdicate. Polynices went to Argos and sought the help of King Adrastus, who with five other chiefs marched against Thebes. Here our play begins: the curse of Oedipus was fulfilled; and the sequel is told in the *Antigone* of Sophocles.

CHARACTERS

ETEOCLES, *son of Oedipus*

ISMENE

ANTIGONE } *sisters of Eteocles*

HERALD

MESSENGER

CHORUS OF THEBAN WOMEN

SCENE: *Before the Citadel of Thebes, which rises in the background, crowded with altars and statues.*

THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES

ETEOCLES

Burghers of Cadmus! Seasonable speech,
And apt withal, the world expects from him
Whose business is a kingdom's governance—
High on the hinder-bulwark of the State
At lonely watch—his hand upon the helm
And never a lull from care to latch his lids.
For, if we prosper, God shall have the thanks;
But—if the sorry thing, I wish away,
Calamity befall—one man, and he
My sole self Eteocles, shall hear his name 10
Sung to loud preludes—universal note
Of wail—which I pray Zeus, whom we acclaim
Averter, to keep far from Cadmus Town.
And now the hour is ripe when all of you—
Whether your prime 's to come or hath gone by—
Must put on strength like buds thick-burgeoning,
Each in such measure as his age allows,
Both for the safety of the realm, her Gods—
Lest their accounted glories be wiped out—
And for your children and this earth—the mother 20
And most dear nurse of your young innocence.
For she it was, who, when as yet we sought,
Weak travellers, her hospitable door,
The kindly soil, to us large welcome gave;
The careful nurture of our nonage bare,
And bred us to be denizens-at-arms
And trusty targeteers in this her need.
And, to this day, in God's just equipoise,
To us-ward shifts the moving balance-hand;
For, long time shut within these bastioned walls, 30
Fair issue (under Heaven) in the main
Our warfare hath. And now, thus saith the Seer,
Who shepherds wingéd flocks; not by things burnt
Divineth he; but inly cogitates,
With deep unerring art his auguries,

By prophecy, which is the voice of God,
Divinely taught: A fresh attack, more strong
Than all that went before, the Achæan host,
Gathering by night, intend against the town.
Therefore make speed unto the battlements
And towered gateways every man of you,
Girded with all the panoply of war!
Man the breast-works! On turret-scaffoldings
Take post! And where forth from the City-gates
The roadways run, hold on with a good heart,
Nor at this rout of runagates be ye
Too sore dismayed; for God shall end all well.
Moreover, I have dispatched scouts and spies
To watch the movements of their host; the which
I am persuaded went not out in vain.
And, having their report, there is no fear
I shall be caught in any ticklish snare.

40

50

Enter MESSENGER.

MESSENGER

Eteocles! right valiant Sovereign
Of the Cadmeans! I bring tidings sure
Of happenings yonder with the armament;
Yea, and these eyes have seen what I report.
Know then, Seven Men—mettlesome Captains all—
Spilling bulls' blood in shield with black hide bound—
Their unctuous hands dipped in that gory chrism—
Have taken a great oath—unutterable—
By Enyo and Phobos that drinketh blood,
To raze these walls from battlement to base
And sack the town of Cadmus, or else die,
And leave to us our fair land soaked with carnage.
For a memorial to their folk at home
They hanged up garlands on Adrastus' car,
Weeping the while; but on their savage lips
Ruth was their none: rather the iron soul
Of stern resolve and red-hot hardihood
Panted in them, and in their lion eyes
Glanced Ares. These are no belated news;
For when I left them they were set about

60

70

Casting of lots for places at the Gates,
 Against which each should march his company.
 Therefore, the nation's chosen and her best
 At every port assemble with all speed.
 By now an Argive power of all arms
 Approaches nigh at hand; the dust is stirred
 With trampling feet; and their deep-chested steeds
 Make the plain white with drops of creaming foam. 80
 Now show thy seamanship, and make all snug
 And weather-tight within, or e'er the blast
 Of Ares strike; for on the dry land roars
 A wave of men, a moving armament.
 These are their dispositions: 'tis for thee
 To grapple with them quickly; for the rest
 My eye shall watch with sure reconnaissance
 The progress of the day, and thou, well served
 With sure intelligence of all without,
 Shalt take no hurt nor harm.

[Exit MESSENGER.]

ETEOCLES

Hearken, O Zeus! 90
 Earth and all tutelary Godheads, hear!
 And shall I name thee, thou paternal Curse,
 With dark Erinys' strong resentment armed?
 O pluck not out this city by the roots,
 Nor utterly destroy it, rendered up,
 The prize of war, with all its settled homes
 Sweet with suave fluctuance of Hellenic speech!
 Grant that this free earth and King Cadmus' town
 May never pass beneath the yoke of slaves!
 Help us! Our common cause methinks, I plead, 100
 For when a happy City sees good days
 Laud and great honour have the gods she worships!

[Exit.]

The CHORUS enter and rush up to the citadel.

CHORUS

I cry with great pangs of dread! For the foe quit their camp!
 Yea, their forces
 Are loosed as a flood is loosed! and a multitude riding on horses

Runneth before, and mine ear no audible tidings seeks:
An airy signal flies! The dust, dumb messenger, speaks!
Loudly the lowlying plain to their thunderous hoofbeat rings!
The sound draweth nigh! And its speed is the speed of a bird
that hath wings!

It roars as waters roar down mountainous channels leaping!
Oh, raise for us your battle-cry! This evil onward
sweeping 110

Turn back, dear Gods! Kind Goddesses, a rescue for our wall!
How the white shields of Argos gleam! How fierce this swift
onfall

Of footmen doubling at the charge, in glamorous armour girt!
Oh, of all worshipped deities, who will this woe avert?

I will make haste to cast me down before your holy feet,
Ye shining shapes of old! Hail, Happy Ones, whose seat
Bideth the shock of times! This, the ripe hour to cling,
Cleaving close to your forms, why waste we waymenting?
Hear ye, or hear ye not, the bucklers clang full loud?

Proffer we now our prayers for the garlands erstwhile vowed, 120
For the robes we wrought on the loom, with worship and
delight!

I see—I hear—the brandished spear—and many there be that
smite!

Wilt thou aid us, Ares long-in-the-land, or wilt thou thine own
betray?

Dear to thee once, God golden-helmed, look down on thy city
this day!

Hail, Godheads all that guard this realm and keep her fortress
free!

Draw nigh! Behold! 'Gainst bondage pleads a virgin com-
pany!

For loud with hissing surges, by blasts of Ares sped,
A wave of men with combing crest our home hath compasséd!
Nevertheless, O Father—Zeus, who o'er-rulest all,
Into the toils of foemen let not their quarry fall! 130

Round the strong place of Cadmus the Argive beaters close!
Men harry men! The hunt is up for blood of human foes!
These bridles bind no flute-boys' cheeks, filled with soft music's
breath!

They buckle bits in war-steeds' mouths! These pipes shrill
woundy death!

As fell the lots helm-shaken, the pride of their great host,
Seven Champions clad in spearman's mail at the Seven Ports
take post!

Hail, Power Zeus-born, that lovest battle! The city save,
Dread Pallas! Hail, Poseidon, Lord of the horse, the wave!
Smite them, as men smite fishes, even with thy forkèd spear!
Be for our trembling, trembling souls a strong deliverer! 140
O Ares! of all pity to thine own kin be kind!

Be warder of the town that calls King Cadmus' fame to mind!
Cypris, ancestress of our race! Blood of thy blood are we!
Yet none the less, as men sue Gods, we turn in prayer to thee!
Be Wolf to them, Wolf-Slayer! With gnashing of the teeth
Requite them! Leto's Daughter, thy silver bow unsheathe!
Cry, cry aloud with wailing! Hera, Mistress Supreme!
The chariots rattle round our walls! The grinding axles
scream!

Oh, gracious Artemis! Shrill, shrill the note—the song of
keening care!

Shook with the rush of volleying spears raves the affrighted
air! 150

How fares it with the city? And what shall be our fate?
And whither doth God lead us? What end doth consummate?
Cry, cry aloud with wailing! Thick, thick, in soaring flight
Bursts on our walls a hail of stones! The parapet they smite!
Benign Apollo! In our gates the bronze-bound bucklers chide!
Queen—Power by Zeus appointed war's issue to decide—
Who stand'st above our city—Onka Invincible!
Deliver the seven-gated seat where thou art pleased to dwell!

Hearken, O Gods and Goddesses, perfect in might and power!
Wardens of march and mountain, watchmen on wall and
tower! 160

Yield not by treachery the town that toileth with the spear,
But faithfully receive our prayer, that with stretched hands draw
near!

Loved Spirits, who, of strength to save, move striding to and
fro

Before our leaguered city, your love for her forthshow!
Think of the rich oblations upon your altars laid,
And mindful of our sacrifice and zealous service—aid!

Enter ETEOCLES.

ETEOCLES

Oh, you intolerable pack! You hags!
 Will 't help the city, think ye?—Will 't inspire
 A bold assurance in the beleaguered troops,
 To cast you down before these antique shapes 170
 —Our Holy Guardians!—there to rave and howl—
 Abjects, disgusted decency abhors!
 Good times, or bad times, may I never house
 With womankind! The courage of a woman
 Is insubmissive, rash, not counsellable,
 And, when she 's timid, she 's an added plague
 To home and fatherland! So is it now!
 Thanks to this hither, thither, to and fro
 Coursing of scared feet, the faint-hearted fear,
 Like to a chill tide, sounding as it goes, 180
 Runs through all orders of the Commonweal!
 And—while the foe without are mightily
 Advantaged—we ourselves within the gates
 Work for our own destruction! Whoso shares
 With womankind his fortunes, let him look
 For the like issue! Whatsoe'er he be,
 Man, woman—or some despicable thing
 Half-way betwixt them both—that from henceforth
 Fails in most strict obedience to my will,
 The damning pebble shall his lot decide, 190
 And he shall publicly be stoned to death!
 It longeth to a man—let womankind
 Keep their own counsel and not mell with ours—
 To manage matters in the world outside.
 Keep within doors and thwart not our designs!
 Now—hast thou heard? Or hast thou failed to hear?
 Or speak I to the deaf—a girl at that?

CHORUS

Dear Son of Oedipus! Fear smote
 My heart, by reason of the din
 Of chariots! For the axle's spin, 200
 The whirring wheel's flute-note!

Because of the bit by fire begot,
That pipeth harsh with breathings hot
Of war-steeds, by the long rein swayed,
I was afraid!

ETEOCLES

Think ye that when she labours by the head
With panic rush from high-pooped stern to prow
The seaman goes about to save his ship?

CHORUS

I hasted to this ancient seat
Because in the Gods I put my trust,
When at the gates with roaring gust
Rattled a hail of deadly sleet.
Then was I moved by fear to pray
Unto the Blessed Gods, that they
Might stretch to shield the town from harm
A mighty arm.

210

ETEOCLES

Pray rather that the battlemented walls
Stand proof against the thrust of foeman's spear.
For were not that behoofful to the Gods?
'Tis a true saying: When a city falls
The Gods forsake their ancient habitations.

220

CHORUS

Not in my time, thou honourable Court
Of Gods, forsake the city: ere that day
When battle riots where her sons resort,
And flames devour her, take my life away!

ETEOCLES

Let me not hear thee call on the good Gods
When thy base heart deviseth cowardice!
The mother of Good-Hap is Loyalty,
The proverb saith; Helpmeet of Him that Saves!

CHORUS

Save it he may; yet him God's power transcends; 230
And often out of rough adversity,
Cloud-wrack above us, where the visual ends,
Man's helplessness God stablisheth on high.

ETEOCLES

These be men's matters—blood of sacrifice,
Offerings to oracles, when deedly war
Puts all things to the test; your business
Is submit silence, and to bide within.

CHORUS

It is the Gods who keep yet unsubdued
The land wherein we dwell; our walléd town
Unravaged of this arméd multitude: 240
Shall what we do then call their vengeance down?

ETEOCLES

I grudge not that to the high heavenly race
Ye pay all honour: but, lest ye corrupt,
As cravens can, the manhood of the realm
Calm your wild transports; this is fear's excess.

CHORUS

The sudden girding on of warlike gear,
Confused upon my startled senses came,
Confounding them the more; surprised by fear
I sought this castled crag of ancient fame.

ETEOCLES

I charge ye, if they tell of wounds and death 250
Fasten not on the tale with frantic cries,
For human carnage is God Ares' meat.

CHORUS

I hear the neighing steeds!

ETEOCLES

Hear if thou must!

Yet seem not so discernibly to hear!

CHORUS

The builded city groans—as if a voice
Spake from the ground! Oh, we are compassed in
On every side!

ETEOCLES

Is 't not enough that I

With all resources wisdom can command
Confront these perils?

CHORUS

Loud and louder yet!—

The knocking at the gate!

ETEOCLES

Stifle thy cries!

260

Must the whole city hear thee?

CHORUS

O ye Gods,

Keep troth! Betray not to the enemy
The City ye have promised to defend!

ETEOCLES

Curse thee! Wilt hold thy peace—possess thy soul
In patience?

CHORUS

O divine co-denizens,

Free while ourselves are free, save me from bondage!

ETEOCLES

Ye do enslave yourselves; country and king,
Ye make both thrall!

CHORUS

O Zeus Omnipotent!
Strike the foe dead—dead—with thy bolt!

ETEOCLES

O Zeus!
What stuff is woman made of, whom they gav'st
To man for helpmeet! 270

CHORUS

Blithesome are we not;
And are men merrier when kingdoms fall?

ETEOCLES

Thy hand upon the holy images
Speak'st thou untowardly with thy tongue?

CHORUS

My fears
Are masters and my tongue a runaway.

ETEOCLES

If I cannot command let me entreat.
Come! With a good grace grant me my request,
And let this quarrel have a gentle close.

CHORUS

Speak with all speed then: haply thou shalt have
As speedy answer.

ETEOCLES

Hush, poor weeping wretch, 280
Or thou wilt scare thy friends.

CHORUS

Nay, I am dumb:
The fate that they must suffer I can endure.

ETEOCLES

I more approve that utterance of thine
Than all that went before: but stop not there!
Away from these sequestered images,
And pray to nobler purpose! Say: 'Ye Gods,
Make war upon our side!' When ye have heard
The prayer I have to offer, second it
With songs triumphant, lusty, of good cheer—
The sacrificial shout that Hellas knows— 290
A salutation to embolden friends
And from their souls the battle-fright cast loose!
Hear, then, my prayer. First, I vow to the Gods,
Custodians of polity and soil,
Wardens of field and meeting-place and mart;
Next unto Dirce's river-springs—nor less
Ismenus, do I mean to honour thee—
If fair befall us and the State be saved,
There shall be slaughtering of bulls; the blood
Of sheep shall redden the hearth-place of the Gods. 300
Thus I confirm by pledge of solemn speech
Mine oath, to them trophies and raiment vowing:
'I will bedeck your shrines inviolate,
Yea, hang the forecourts of your sanctuaries
With spoils spear-rent, the garments of our foes.'
On this wise pray ye! Thus acceptably
Approach the Gods with vows; not to vain groans
Addict, beast noises not articulate,
Untutored transports, ineffectual;
For by such flights ye shall no whit the more 310
Flee the appointed portion. I meanwhile
Will get me forth: and post at the Seven Gates
To match the foe six men of might and mettle,
Myself the seventh—furnished in the style
Greatness approves; ere rumour improvised
Inform them, or with speedier argument
Extremity of need inflame their souls.

[THE CHORUS comes down from the Citadel and forms a rectangle about the altar.

CHORAL HYMN

Fain I would hearken, fain obey,
 But my heart's calm slumber-beat dismay
 And dread have troubled sore: 320
 And care (ill neighbour I wish away)
 Looks in at the open door;
 And the trembling flame of fear is fed
 Because of the walls encompassèd,
 As trembles the dove for her nestlings' sake,
 For her cradled brood, when the cruel snake
 Creeps to their twilight bed.

Hither in complete armour dight
 Moveth against these towers
 A multiple host; and yonder light 330
 The jagged sling-stone showers.
 And our people are smitten from far and near,
 And I know not my fate, but I tremble and fear,
 And I pray the Gods of race divine
 To save the men of Cadmus' line
 And the city to Cadmus dear.

Where to redeem your loss shall be found
 In earth's wide fields more fertile ground,
 If ye yield this land to the foe,
 Where, through the deep, rich soil enwound, 340
 The waters of Dirce flow?
 Nourisher she of man and mead,
 Quencher of thirst and quickener of seed;
 No rill more excellent in worth
 Of all Poseidon Lord of Earth
 Poureth or Tethys' children speed.
 Therefore, ye Gods, that are our stay,
 Yonder without the wall
 Send havoc; with slaughter and casting away
 Of shields, when slain men fall: 350
 But dismiss not our prayers unheard, disowned,
 Our lamentable cry entoned:
 Save us and win for our land renown;
 Then reign within the wallèd town
 Unshakably enthroned!

Sorrow it were thus to send down to hell a city coeval with
grandeurs of old
Captive and spoil of an enemy spear, 'mid the crumbling of
ashes; her store and her gold
Sacked by the Achaean as things of no worth, unregarded of
Heaven; sore sorrow it were
Should mother and matron and maiden and bride as a horse by
the forelock be haled by the hair
With rending of raiment. Loud, loud is the voice of a city
made empty: her children's farewells— 360
As they go to their ruin—confused with exultings; and heavy
the doom that my fear foretells.
Woe for the lawless reaping of unripe corn; for the rape of the
bride unwed,
For the far strange home and the long, long way to it, travelled
with hate, she must tread!
Nay, of a truth, where dead men dwell, there is more of bliss;
for with multiple ills
When a city is taken man visiteth man; he leads away captive,
he spills
Blood, he thrusts in fire; he anoints with defilement of smoke
man's home;
The soul of all reverence a mad breath pollutes when Ares hath
masterdom!

Tumult and roaring in all streets and wynds;
The fencéd bulwark fails; and man to man each finds
His foe; and, having found, 370
Lets drive his spear and bears him to the ground.
And blood-bedabbled mothers of babes new-born
For their dead sucklings like the ewe-flock bleat;
By harrying bands
Kindred from kin are torn;
And two shall meet
Each with his load; or one with empty hands
Shall call upon his fellow in like case,
Neither with less nor equal satisfied,
Saying: 'Since all men for themselves provide, 380
How shall we fare if backward in the race?'

All manner store the housewife's eyes distress,
Chance-lying where it fell: all earth's largesse

Foamed recklessly to waste.

And, new to sorrow, with worse bonds disgraced,
The young girl-slave looks for a conqueror's bed;
A rich lord, yet in love most destitute,

Whose only mark

Of greatness is the slaver's attribute,
When fierce embraces in the lustful dark

390

Exact with nightly ravishment his pay;

And her bewail'd griefs find this redress

That tears let fall in day-long loneliness,

Night's all-aborred endearments wipe away!

SEMI-CHORUS

Look where our spy comes! Dear ones, he brings tidings

Be certain, of some happening with the host!

With smoothest expedition at high speed

He runneth thither, as the hubbed wheel spins!

SEMI-CHORUS

And see! With juncture apt to meet his news,

The king himself, the Son of Oedipus!

400

He, too, all haste, metes out no measured stride!

Enter MESSENGER and ETEOCLES.

MESSENGER

I bring news—certain—of the enemy,

How the lots fell and at which port each stands.

Fell Tydeus—foremost—fronts the Proetid Gate,

Roaring; but may not pass Ismenus Ford:

The seer forbids: the omens are not good.

There greedy Tydeus, famishing for fight,

Sends forth his voice, like to a venomous snake

Hissing at noon; and lasheth with vile words

410

The prophet, Oecles' son: damning his lore

For cringing cowardice that shrinks from death

And jeopardy of battle: while he vents

Such blasphemy, he tosses his dwarf-head

All overshadowed with a triple crest,

His bright helm's bristling mane. Beneath his shield,

From its dished rondure dangling, bells of bronze
 A yelling menace peal: the broad convex,
 Bulging, displays this arrogant device:
 The sky in metal wrought, ablaze with stars:
 And in the middle of his shield the moon— 420
 Lustrous, full-orbed, leader and paramount
 Of all their constellations—looketh forth,
 The very eye of night. And like one wood,
 Thus in prodigious pride caparisoned,
 He holloas up and down the river-bank,
 Rampant with lust of battle; as a horse
 All fire and fierceness pants upon the bit,
 What time, hard-held, he paweth in his place
 Mad for the sound of trumpet. Whom wilt thou
 To him oppose? What champion safe and sure 430
 Shall stand at Proetid Port, the barriers down?

ETEOCLES

I am not one to tremble at a plume:
 'Tis not the brave device that deals the scar,
 And crests and bells without the spear bite not.
 As for this night that 's blazoned on his shield,
 This heaven of shining stars—the folly of it
 Will likely prove a night of prophecy.
 For if Death's bloody darkness veil his eyes,
 Then, for the bearer of that scutcheon proud,
 By herald's law these arms are his by right, 440
 And his presumptuous scutcheon damns himself!
 'Gainst Tydeus I will post the valiant son
 Of Astacus for champion of the Gate.
 Right nobly born is he, and one who pays
 Due honour to the throne of Modesty,
 Abhorrer of the bombast rhetoric;
 Backward in baseness, he holds honour dear.
 Sprung from that seed of men which Ares spared,
 A goodly plant, most native to this soil,
 Is Melanippus. Ares may decide 450
 With hazard helm-cast how the event shall speed;
 But Justice by sure warranty of blood
 Commits to him in trust the life of her
 Who gave him birth, to shield from thrust of foes.

CHORUS

Just is his cause who fights for his land! Him may the just Gods
prosper and speed!
Yet I see the pale forms of our loved ones lie bleeding, and
tremble; for us, their beloved, they bleed!

MESSENGER

May the Gods grant your prayer—and prosper him!
Electrae Portals fell to Capaneus.
Another Earth-born he—in height surpassing
The last—and his proud boast too proud for man. 460
He monstrously inveighs against these walls
With threats, which may the event forbear to crown!
On this wise boasteth he: 'With or without
God's will, by me the City shall be sacked!
Though Zeus dispute my passage, casting down
His lightning for a stumbling-block of fire,
It lets me not!' He scorns your thunderbolt!
Your forkèd lightning he dubs 'noonday heat'!
And, for device, carries a firebearer—
An unarmed man—for weapon in his hands 470
A blazing torch; and, issuing from his mouth,
This golden challenge: 'I will fire the town.'
Do thou dispatch 'gainst such a champion—
But who will stand against him? Who will bide
The man with all his vaunts and never blench?

ETEOCLES

Gain upon gain, and interest to boot:
The hearts of frenzied men are in their mouths:
The tongue's the true accuser of false thoughts.
When Capaneus threatens he's prepared to act
His blasphemies; and when he dareth all 480
That tongue may dare, with insane zest the man
Challenges heaven and storms the ear of Zeus
With swelling words. But he shall have, y-wis,
Fit answer, when that firebearer comes
Which is the burning bolt, fashioned no wise
In likeness to the warmth of noonday sun.
'Gainst him a man, exceeding slow of speech,

In spirit very fire, we have set;
The might of Polyphontes; a strong tower
By favour of protecting Artemis 490
And other Gods withal. Pray you proceed:
Another and the gate that he hath drawn.

CHORUS

Death to the braggart! Fall, thunder, and stay him! ere with
leaping he come and with lifting of spear
To despoil my fair home, my virginal bower—robber and
wrecker and ravisher!

MESSENGER

Now for the next gate and the man that drew it:
The third cast fell upon Eteoclus;
Third from the upturned helm, goodly with bronze,
For him leapt forth the lot to hurl his troop
Against Neistae Portals. Round and round
He reins his mares, and they toss high their heads 500
With gleam of glancing harness—all on fire
To fall upon the Gate. Their nozzles pipe
After the mode of barbarous music, filled
With the breath of their proud snortings. On his targe
Is no mean blazon. One armed cap-à-pie
Climbs up a ladder planted 'gainst a tower,
Held by the foe, and means to lay all waste.
In syllables forth-gushing from his lips
He roars: 'Not Ares' self shall hurl me down.'
'Gainst him too send a trusty one, to save 510
This land of freemen from the servile yoke.

ETEOCLES

Here is the man to send, and with him go
Such happy fortune as the Gods vouchsafe!
Not in his mouth his boast, but in his arm.
Megareus, Creon's seed, of the race earth-sown.
The savage, greedy noise of neighing steeds
Shall not affright nor drive him from the Gates;
But either he will fall and with his life
This land for her dear nurture recompense,

Or deck his father's house with two-fold glory:
 Two captives taken and that shield-borne tower,
 So proudly counterfeited, carried home.
 Another boaster: stint me not your tale!

520

CHORUS

Good luck, good luck have thou who go'st forth,
 Champion of home to me! Foul them befall!
 Mouthing in madness beneath our wall,
 Zeus the Requiter behold them with wrath.

MESSENGER

Next—fourth in order—to the Gate hard by
 Athena Onca comes Hippomedon
 Shouting his war-shout: a resplendent shape,
 Cast in a mould of ample magnitude. 530
 His shield might almost serve for a threshing-floor;
 And while its round he threateningly revolved
 I own a shudder ran through all my frame.
 No despicable artist was the man
 Who wrought its blazon. On the disk embossed
 A Typhon, shooting forth his burning breath—
 A luminous darkness, half smoke and half fire;
 The casing of its hollow-bellied orb
 Securely hammered on with knots of snakes. 540
 I heard his great voice thunder—saw his eyes
 Glare horribly: a frenzied votarist
 He leaped, God Ares' reeling reveller,
 By him possessed, mad-drunk for deeds of blood:
 'Gainst his assault there needeth wary watch.
 Even now before the Gates his vaunt is loud,
 And swelling with the note that strikes dismay.

ETEOCLES

Suburban Pallas—Onka-Without-the-Walls—
 Hard by the Gate, wroth with his insolence,
 Shall keep him off—a serpent, mailed and fanged,
 Death in its coils, barred from a brood of birds. 550
 But Oenops' trusty son, Hyperbius,
 For mortal succour—matching man with man—

Shall face him. All he asked was choice for service;
 Time and the hour should teach him where to serve.
 Faultless in form; of fearless courage, perfect
 In martial trim, never did Hermes cast
 A luckier throw than when with happy choice
 He brought the pair together: for betwixt
 Him and the man he meets is enmity, 560
 And in the smiting of their shields shall clash
 Opposing deities. For the one presents
 Typhon that breathes forth fire; but Father Zeus
 Sits on the other, moveless on his throne,
 And centred in his hand the bolt that burns!
 And who hath yet seen Zeus discomfited?
 These are the powers whose favour they invoke,
 We with the winners, with the losers they,
 If Zeus be more than Typhon's match in battle!
 Yea, by his blazon each shall stand or fall; 570
 And Zeus displayed upon his shield shall prove
 Zeus the strong Saviour to Hyperbius!

CHORUS

He whose arm Zeus' enemy sustains—
 Monster unfriended, Earth whilome bore,
 Whom demons and Gods and mortals abhor—
 Right at the Gate he shall dash out his brains!

MESSENGER

Amen to that. Next in the list and fifth
 In order, at the Gates of Boreas,
 Hard by Amphion's Tomb, the son of Zeus,
 This champion takes ground. A spear he hath 580
 Whereby he sweareth—honouring it more
 Than any God—yea, holding it more dear
 Than eyesight: 'I will ravage Cadmus Town,
 Ay, maugre Zeus!' Thus he—a cub, whose dam
 Littered among the mountains—a green chit,
 Yet of a comely countenance withal,
 Man-boy or boy-man—call him what you will—
 The down upon his cheeks buds thick and fast—
 For 'tis with him the spring-time of his growth—
 But of a savage temper—in no wise 590

Maidenly, as befits his name—he strode,
 His eyeballs rolling—not without his boast
 Advancing to the Gates. Our infamy
 On his bronze shield, orbéd to protect his bulk,
 He flashed: the ogrish Sphinx, so riveted
 That its embossed and staring ugliness
 His arm convulsed to hideous counterfeit
 Of life and motion. Underneath he sports
 The figure of a man—a wight Cadmean—
 As if on him to centre all our bolts! 600
 He 'll prove no petty trafficker in war—
 Nor for a bagman's profit lose his travel—
 Parthenopæus, waif of Arcady!
 Oh, that a rogue like this—an outlander
 In Argos, one who pays his reckoning,
 A handsome sum for being handsome-bred,
 Should hurl against these walls his boyish spite
 And spleenful threats, I pray God bring to naught!

ETEOCLES

If the same measure that they mete the Gods
 Be meted out to them, then their bad vows 610
 Shall hurl them far in hopeless overthrow!
 But for him too, your churl Arcadian,
 A knight is found: no braggart, but his hand
 Soon finds the thing to do! Actor his name,
 Brother of him just chosen. No foul flood
 Of deedless words will he let flow within
 To water pale, rank weeds of cowardice;
 Nor will he suffer to overpass these walls
 The man who comes in guise of foe, escutcheoned
 With that abhorred beast! She shall be wroth 620
 With him that carries her, when, at our gates,
 The too industrious hammerstroke of war
 Her bulging blazon dints with rude reverse!
 Nevertheless, I leave it to the Gods!
 And may they prove that I speak verity!

CHORUS

This rives my heart! Ruffles my braided locks
 Until each hair with horror stands up stiff!

Blasphemy of unholy men that mocks
Things holy! O ye Gods—if—if
Ye be indeed Gods that requite,
Smite them! with ruin smite!

630

MESSENGER

I am near ended. Sixth there came a man
In temper most majestic, in might
Excelling all—the prophet, Amphiarus.
Before the Homolean Gates he stood
Chiding great Tydeus with much eloquence.
‘Assassin! Troubler of the public peace!
In Argos arch-preceptor of all wrong!
Erinys’ call-boy! Slaughter’s acolyte!
Organ of evil counsel to the soul
Of old Adrastus!’ Then he called aloud
The name of Polyneices—thy blood-brother—
And lifting up his eyes to Heaven, paused—
An awful pause—on that last syllable
That speaks of strife. And thus his thoughts break loose:
‘Doubtless, this is a deed to please the Gods—
A noble gest, which they who come hereafter
Will much delight to tell or hearken to—
To wreck thy father’s kingdom and thy Gods,
Hurling upon them an invading host!
Is it in Justice’ name thou would’st drain dry
The fount that flowed for thee with mother’s milk?
And if thou master with thy jealous sword
Thy fatherland, how will it profit thee?
I shall make fat this earth! Yea, prophesy
Here in my grave, in hostile ground interred.
On then to battle! And for me—to death
Not all unhonoured!’ So the prophet spake,
His shield of bronze at rest. It bore no blazon:
For his affections hang not on the show
Of seeming to be best, but being so!
And he reaps only where the soil hath depth
The golden wisdom of well-pondered thought!
My counsel is that thou dispatch against him
Antagonists as wise as they are brave;
He ’s to be feared who reverences the Gods!

640

650

660

ETEOCLES

This moves me much! 'Tis the unhappy chance
That couples oft the just with many wicked!
In the affairs of men no ill compares
With bad associates! There springeth thence 670
A crop no man would harvest. The field of Sin
Brings forth the fruits of Death. For, peradventure,
One righteous man who reverences the Gods
Shall shipmate be with a ruffianly crew,
And, furthering some scheme of villainy,
Perish with the whole tribe by God accursed!
Or, in a state where cynic policy
Goes the broad way of international crime,
And men forget the Gods, there shall be found
One just man, who, though he hath done no wrong, 680
Caught in the snare of his compatriot's guilt,
Falls, smitten with the chastisement of Heaven
That visiteth them all! So is it now
With the seer, Oecles' son! A man most staid,
Just, valiant, God-fearing, greatly endowed
With prophecy, but 'gainst his better mind
Consorting with blasphemers, when they take
The road which to retrace is hard and long.
He, if it be the will of Zeus, shall fall
With all his bad confederates dragged down! 690
I do not think he will so much as move
Against the Gates; not that he lacks the courage
Or is at heart attaint with cowardice,
But having certain knowledge of the way
The fight must end for him; if the oracle
Of Loxias bear fruit; and he is wont
To speak to purpose if he speak at all.
Nevertheless, I make choice of a man
To send against him, valiant Lasthenes:
He keepeth on the stranger at the Gate 700
A jealous ward: in wisdom of ripe years
But of a youthful brawn yet immature.
A man so quick of eye, so sure of hand,
That instant through the undefended flesh
Crashes his spear, if aught that's vulnerable
Be left uncovered at the buckler's edge.

Howbeit, howsoe'er we thrust or fend
Victory is a gift men owe to Heaven.

CHORUS

May the Gods hear our prayers, for they are just;
And grant them for the safety of our land; 710
And be the invader's weapon backward thrust,
Yea, in his own breast with a mighty hand!
On them may Zeus his bolt let fall
Yonder without the wall!

MESSENGER

Last name of all—seventh at the seventh Gate—
Thy brother! Hear what woes his prayers invoke
On thee and on this realm! He 'll plant his foot
Upon our walls: our land shall hear his name
Heralded; the loud paean he will uplift.
Yea, he will seek thee out and slay thee first, 720
Then die beside thee! Or 'If he fall not,
But live; exile for exile, wrong for wrong,
Measure for measure! As he drove me out,
So shall he wander forth a fugitive.'
And for the fair fulfilment of these hopes
He invokes the Gods that knit in love
Each to his kin and all men to their home.
Well named is he 'the Mighty One in Quarrel'!
A new-wrought shield he bears—the Argive buckler,
Round, with two-fold device artificered. 730
Hammered in gold a man completely armed
Led by a woman-form of sober mien.
Justice he calls her; suiting to that name
Her legend: 'I will bring home the banished man:
He shall possess his land, and come and go,
Free of his father's house.' Here ends the tale
Of all their proud inventions: make thy choice
Whom thou wilt send against him. And as I
Will be the faithful herald of thy word,
Prove thou true Captain of the Ship of State! 740

[Exit MESSENGER.]

ETEOCLES

O house of Oedipus! *Our* house! O race
 God-maddened—God-abominate—all tears!
 Oh me! here ends—here ends my father's curse!
 And yet this is no time to weep and wail,
 Lest sorrow's debt with usury of sorrow
 Gender increase of groans! 'Mighty in Quarrel'!
 Well-named! Well-named! Ay, we shall know anon
 Where it will end, that blazon—we shall know
 Whether the gilded rant, writ on his shield
 And fraught with frenzy, will fetch the bearer home! 750
 If the maid Justice, Zeus' own child, had been
 The inspiration of his thoughts—had lent
 Her countenance to his deeds, this might have been!
 But neither when from antenatal gloom
 He fled—at nurse, in adolescence, nor
 When 's beard grew thick, did Justice ever own him
 Or speak him fair! Nor is it credible
 That in this hour when perils thicken fast
 To overwhelm his fatherland, she stands beside him!
 No! Justice is Justice! She were falsely named 760
 Succouring such a miscreant! In this faith
 I go to meet him! Who hath better right?
 Ay, king to king, and brother unto brother,
 Foe matched with foe! My greaves! Fetch me my greaves!
 Good gear 'gainst javelin-thrust or cast of stone!

CHORUS

Be not, beloved—child of Oedipus—
 Like unto him out of whose mouth proceeds
 All wickedness! Alas! It is enough
 If our Cadmeans with these Argives fight:
 There 's water for that blood; but brother-murder 770
 Is like the tettered slough that will not off:
 'Tis spotted with the guilt that ne'er grows old!
 If evil come, so it be free from shame,
 Why let it come. All titles else save honour
 Die when we die and sleep with us in the grave:
 But if to evil thou add infamy
 How shall men speak it fair and call it honest?

Child, what crav'st thou? Let not the battle-lust
Bloody with dripping spears thy ruin be!
Forth from thy soul the evil passion thrust
Or e'er it mount apace and master thee!

780

ETEOCLES

Since in this power that speeds the event I feel
The insupportable blast of God's own breath,
Blow, wind! Fill, sails! And where Cocytus' tide
Heaves dark, with gleams of Phoebus' fiery hate,
Down-wind let drift the last of Laius' line!

CHORUS

This is some fierce unnatural appetite
That hungers after flesh unseethed and raw!
Famished for human victims! The loathed rite
Whose fruit is sour, whose blood sins 'gainst the law!

790

ETEOCLES

It is my father's curse! I feel the glare
Of those hard eyes not moist with human tears!
To do things horrible they importune me!
There is a voice which cries: 'Swift death were sweet!'

CHORUS

Hear it not, child! No man shall call thee base
If on thy life there dawn a better day!
Hereafter, if the Gods thy offerings grace,
Will not black-stoled Erinyes steal away?

ETEOCLES

What are the Gods to me! Methinks the hour
When we regarded them is long gone by:
No offering in their eyes is of such worth
As our perdition! Why then pay them court?
Why cringe for respite from the final doom?

800

CHORUS

Yield now, while yet thou hast the chance! The wind
 May change with time, that blows so contrary,
 And thy bad Genius at last be kind!
 But now thou battlest with a boiling sea!

ETEOCLES

Ay! with the yeasty waves of Oedipus
 His curse! There was too much of solid sooth
 In the slight, fleeting visions of my dreams:
 They make division of my father's substance!

810

CHORUS

Thou art no friend to woman: yet, wilt hear me?

ETEOCLES

If thou hast ought to say a man may do,
 Speak on; and in few words withal!

CHORUS

Go not

Where thou art going—to the Seventh Gate!

ETEOCLES

Content thee! Therefore have I filed my mind;
 And words are not the stuff to dull its edge.

CHORUS

To win is all: get glory he who can:
 The victory won wins God's acknowledgment.

ETEOCLES

He who girds on his armour owes no love
 To that wise saw.

820

CHORUS

And yet the greater fault—

To lay rash hands upon thy brother's life
 And with those crimson juices strain thy soul—
 Mislikes thee not!

ETEOCLES

Sin may be thrust upon us:
 Evil when Heaven sends it, who shall shun?

[*Exit.*

CHORAL HYMN

By this cold shuddering fit of fear
 My heart divines a presence here,
 Goddess or Ghost yclept;
 Wrecker of homes, and dark adept
 Of prophecy, whose vastitude of ill 830
 This hour and all hours shall at last fulfil.
 Thou Curse that from the gloom
 Of nether Hell

A Sire invoked; implacable
 Erinys, whom in fierce excess of wrath
 Grief-maddened Oedipus did summon forth,
 Thou'rt in this strife to work his children's doom.

Ah, stranger from the far-off land,
 Scyth—Chalyb—in thine iron hand
 The lots are shaken; thine award 840
 Is dealt with the devouring sword,
 Whose biting edge doth make partition cold
 Of all the goodly gear men get and hold.
 With them so shall it be,
 These, next of kin
 In blood and guilt and sin,
 Of all their father's famous fields widespread
 They shall at last be disinherited,
 Lords of so much earth as dead men have in fee.

When children, by one sire begot, 850
 To whom one woeful womb gave birth,
 In mortal combat meet and die,
 And that bright pool wherein they lie
 Drunk by the dust of thirsty earth
 Is curdled to a darker clot,
 What power of prayer shall purify,
 What water wash away the stain?
 But, ah, what drops incarnadine
 The new, the old, the mingled wine,
 That Laius' house must drain! 860

From springs of old transgression flow
The guilt, the sorrow swift to follow.
Not yet, not yet is vengeance spent,
Sons' sons abide the chastisement
Of him who hearkened not Apollo—
Laius, first-parent of this woe.
Three sacred embassies he sent,
And thrice where Delphic rocks are piled,
Of earth's vast wheel the massy nave,
The priestess cried: 'If thou would'st save 870
Thy kingdom, get no child.'

But Love was master; he begot
Death for himself and shame,
The son that slew him, witting not—
King Oedipus his name.
Who eared the womb where he lay hid,
Seed of a curse unborn,
Sowing the sacred field forbid
To reap in blood the corn.
Their bridal torch Erinyes fed, 880
And madness strewed their nuptial bed.

And now, as 'twere a sea of woe
That may not come to rest,
Wave follows after wave; and, lo,
A third with triple crest
That breaks with moaning thunder stored
About the ship of State;
Scarce wall-wide is the weather-board
Stretched betwixt us and Fate;
And I have fears lest Cadmus Town, 890
Whelmed with its royal house, go down!

Like an old debt unpaid is an ancient curse:
And in the soul's commerce
It comes to audit, hath its settling day:
A heavy reckoning for man to pay
When not one damning entry is passed by.
From deck to keelson there is rummage then
And jettison of wealth of moiling men,
Waxed fat with overmuch prosperity.

This was well seen in Oedipus ill-starred. 900
High in the God's regard
He stood; by the fireside of him was laud;
In streets and squares where'er men walk abroad
Or great assemblies gather in debate,
Was never wight so praised, what time he smote
The she-fiend, gobbling down her gory throat
Comers and goers at the City Gate.

But on his noonday broke a ghastly light;
And, sounding all the sorrow of his wooing,
One final grief he wrought to his undoing 910
With that same hand that laid his father low;
And put away the eyes that gave him sight
Of his loathed offspring, gotten to his woe.

And then he cursed them (for they grudged him bread);
With bitter words of grief and anger chiding:
'A day shall come, a day of sharp dividing,
And he that carves shall carve with steel,' he cried.
Now the curse falls upon his children's head,
And my hushed heart awaits Erinys' stride.

Enter MESSENGER.

MESSENGER

Take courage, weak ones! Mother's children all! 920
This free land hath escaped the yoke of slaves.
The boastings of the mighty are brought low:
The ship is in still waters: wave on wave
Smote her, but her stout seams have sprung no leak;
Sound are her bulwarks; her ports weather-tight;
Her champions have well-discharged their trust.
Count gate by gate and six have prospered well;
And for the seventh—Apollo, Lord of Seven,
Took that by right of his prerogative:
And there he fitly stayed the Laian rage. 930

CHORUS

Is not the measure of her mourning full?
And must this stricken realm find room for more?

MESSENGER

The realm is safe: but, for her princely seed——

CHORUS

I dread so much the thing thou hast to say
I scarce attend thee; what dost thou mean? Speak on!

MESSENGER

If thou hast power to listen, mark my words.
The Sons of Oedipus——

CHORUS

Oh, Misery!
They say prophets of evil utter truth,
And I am of them!

MESSENGER

Indistinguishably
They have gone down into the dust.

CHORUS

So far
Fallen! Thy tale is heaviness; nevertheless
Tell it to the end!

940

MESSENGER

I tell thee they are dead:
They slew each other!

CHORUS

Ah, fraternal hands!
Too near were ye in birth, too near in blood.

MESSENGER

Yea! And their undivided destiny
Twinned them in death: their evil Genius slew them,
And blotted from the world an ill-starred race.
Such cause we have for thankfulness and tears;

The land is well at ease; that twin-born pair,
Lords and disposers of the Commonwealth, 950
Have made partition with the hammered steel,
Tough Scyth, of all their substance, scot and lot,
And they shall hold it indefeasibly,
Quieted in possession by the grave!
There, to that final resting place borne down
By the dark current of a father's curse.
The realm is safe: dark earth hath drunk their blood,
The royal blood that like twin fountains rose;
One hour of birth—one hour of combat—one
Of death—dealt mutually by fraternal hands. 960
[Exit MESSENGER.]

CHORUS

O Sovran Zeus, Protecting Powers,
Who have indeed kept safe these well-beloved towers,
Whether shall I rejoice
For that the city stand inviolate
Or shall I rather with a lamentable voice
Weep and bewail her leader's fate?
Ah, cruel doom! Ah, children dead!
Mighty in Quarrel ye have ended
Even as the name portended,
Yea, in your wickedness ye are perished. 970

CHORAL HYMN

O curse of Oedipus! O malison
Dark—unrelenting—damning all his line!
Over this heart of mine
Comes creeping on,
Cold Misery, your chilly breath,
Because, when like a Thyiad in her madness
I seemed to hear
The blood that drips
Where men lie slain, 979
Then with the voice of mourning and with rueful lips
I sang the song of death!
O ill refrain,
Glee chanted without mirth or gladness,
That keeps a sorry burden to the spear.

Rather the word, the never wearying
Once uttered malediction of their sire,
Wrought to this issue dire.

Nay, Laius King

Hath here his wish; the course he chose
Begun in blindness and in disobeying 990
Toucheth its bourne.

Ambitions high

And cares of State

Blunt not the edge of heavenly prophecy.

O, wailed for many woes,

Past belief in hate

And past belief in fratricidal slaying,

Is this a tale or is it sooth we mourn?

[*The bodies of ETEOCLES and POLYNEICES are borne on to the Stage.*]

Behold! self-manifest they come;

They need no harbinger; 1000

A double woe, a mutual doom,

Care that hath slaughtered care.

New sorrows from old sorrows spring,

And both have here their home-bringing.

Ah! pilgrim-ship, your lofty poop

No festal garlands wreath:

The drowsy sails half idly droop,

And they are dark as death:

Bound where no sunny Cyclads shine,

And bright Apollo hath no shrine. 1010

Waft, waft her down the wind of sighs,

With speed of plangent hand

Row her beyond these happy skies

Unto the sunless land—

Where across Acheron voices call,

And region darkness welcomes all.

Enter ANTIGONE and ISMENE.

But dearer lips must chant their threnody;

And that unhappy cause

Here to their brethren draws,

A sister pair, the maid Antigone, 1020

Ismene by her side. Tears may be sold,
And raiment rent for mercenary gold,
And money purchaseth the hireling's cries:
These warm, white breasts shall heave with heartfelt sighs;
But ere the dirge begin, let us prolong
 With well accordant breath
Erinys' loud, harsh, unmelodious song,
The dismal paean of the Lord of Death.

Unhappy sisters, most unblest
Of all that e'er held brother dear, 1030
Or bound beneath a tender breast
The cincture noble women wear;
From feignèd grief no forced lament I borrow;
The heart's voice speaks when I shrill forth my sorrow.

O ye perverse, to counsel blind
 Ye weariless in woe!
Must courage turn its hand 'gainst kind,
 Power its own house lay low?
And sought ye death or sought ye doom
And ruin for your house and home? 1040

Her princely walls ye tumbled flat;
 In rivalry for her
A bitter monarchy ye gat—
 The sword your peacemaker.
Sceptred Erinys keeps your house,
Wreaking the wrath of Oedipus.

Oh, ill encounter! Fellowship
 Of hands that hatred joins!
The drops that from these gashes drip
 Flow from the self-same loins! 1050
Woe for the curse with Heaven allied,
Red with the blood of fratricide!

Oh gaping wound, still bleeding fresh:
O rent that ruined all,
And thrusting through fraternal flesh
 Struck home at house and hall.
One bitter curse for both; yea, none
Hath less or more of malison!

Realm-wide the sound of mourning runs:
The bastioned walls make moan; 1060
This earth that loveth her strong sons
Sends up a hollow groan;
And all they perished to possess
Waiting new heirs lies ownerless.

Too keen their cause to prosecute,
Too jealous for just share;
And he who solved their bitter suit
Think ye that he judged fair?
Ares that judgeth by the sword—
Small thanks hath he for his reward! 1070

To battle they had made appeal,
And battle heard their cause;
That iron judge, the trenchant steel,
Hath brought them to this pause,
In undisturbed tenure cold
Their father's grave to have and hold!

Loud is my wail! My heart is rent
With grief's authentic cry!
No gladness lurks in this lament,
Feigned grief false thoughts belie! 1080
The fountains of my being flow
For royal men in death laid low!

How shall we praise them? Shall we say
Their own should love them well,
Seeing they wrought much in their day,
Were wondrous hospitable?
When host met host, the pledge was graced;
They lavished all—in laying waste!

O crown of women, woe-begone!
Of mothers, most unblest! 1090
Who took to husband her own son,
And suckled at her breast
Babes, that in mutual slaughter bleed:
Here ends that sowing—and the seed!

Yea, in their seed-time they were twinned,
And clove in twain by hate
They are clean gone—a stormy wind
Hath swept them to their fate:
Such peace-making these brawlers have,
And their conclusion is the grave.

1100

There they forget to hate: their strife
Springs to no fierce rebirth:
The sundered rivers of their life
Mingle in peaceful earth;
And in that dark, distempered clay
Too near, too near in blood are they.

Alack! The alien of the sea,
Keen iron, fire's own child,
With bitter blows, unlovingly
Their quarrel reconciled;
Ares hath sharp division made;
He heard the prayer their father prayed.

1110

They have their portion! poor, poor souls!
A little fathom-span
Of ground, illiberal fortune doles;
No more the gods give man;
And 'neath them lying stark and cold
Earth's wealth unplumbed, her gems and gold.

Wail for the wreath of victory
That crowns their race with woe!
Wail for the Curse's triumph-cry,
Shrieked for their overthrow!
Wail for the line that broke and fled—
And found a refuge with the dead!

1120

There stands a trophy at the gate,
Where breast to breast they fell;
The votive offering of Hate
And Havoc hot from hell;
There their ill star its strength essayed,
Nor till both sank its fury stayed!

1130

THE DIRGE

ANTIGONE

Smiter smitten!

ISMENE

Slayer slain!

ANTIGONE

Blood on thy spear!

ISMENE

On thy breast that stain!

ANTIGONE

Weep the wrong!

ISMENE

Wail the woe!

ANTIGONE

Make grief thy song!

ISMENE

Let thy tears flow!

ANTIGONE *and* ISMENE

Misery! Ah, misery!

ANTIGONE

Oh, maddened breast!

1140

ISMENE

Oh, moaning heart!

ANTIGONE

Wept with all tears thou art!

ISMENE

And thou of all unhappy things unhappiest!

ANTIGONE

Slain by thine own thou liest dead!

ISMENE

Yea, and this hand its own blood shed!

ANTIGONE

So is a tale of grief twice told!

ISMENE

A double horror to behold!

ANTIGONE

Two woes in dreadful neighbourhood!

ISMENE

They lie together mingled in their blood!

CHORUS

O Fate! How heavy is thy hand! 1150
How grievous are the gifts that thou dost bring!
Great shade of Oedipus who banned
His own offspring—
Offended ghost—Erinys black as hell,
Surely thou art of might unconquerable!

ANTIGONE *and* ISMENE

Misery! ah, misery!

ANTIGONE

Sorrow's gifts are ill to see!

ISMENE

These back from exile thou didst bring to me!

ANTIGONE

He fought and slew; yet home is far away!

ISMENE

He won the cause, but perished in the fray!

1160

ANTIGONE

Ill he sped—for he is fled!

ISMENE

And this poor soul is numbered with the dead!

ANTIGONE

Bad brotherhood was this!

ISMENE

Yea, and they had but little bliss!

ANTIGONE

One sorrow! One death-song!

ISMENE

Bewept with tears that weep a threefold wrong!

CHORUS

O Fate! How heavy is thy hand!

How grievous are the gifts that thou dost bring!

Great shade of Oedipus who banned

His own offspring—

1170

Offended ghost—Erinys black as hell,

Surely thou art of might unconquerable!

ANTIGONE

Now thou know'st thou didst transgress!

ISMENE

Now thou own'st thy wickedness!

ANTIGONE

Back returned with murderous stride!

ISMENE

Fugitive and fratricide!

ANTIGONE

Oh, the woeful victory!

ISMENE

Oh, the sorry sight to see!

ANTIGONE

Wail the grief!

ISMENE

Weep the wrong!

1180

ANTIGONE

To home and country both belong!

ISMENE

Mine the woe!

ANTIGONE

This long anguish ends even so!

ISMENE

Wretchedest of mortal kind!

ANTIGONE *and* ISMENE

Sinning with a frenzied mind!

ANTIGONE

Where to lay them—in what grave?

ISMENE

Where most honour they may have!

ANTIGONE *and* ISMENE

Yea, these children of his woe
Shall be their father's bedfellow!

Enter a HERALD.

HERALD

Hold! Let me first discharge a duty. I	1190
Am come with mandate from the Governors	
Appointed by the people of this realm	
Cadmean. Their high will and pleasure is	
That, forasmuch as good Eteocles	
Was loyally affected to this land,	
Ye do inter him in its tender soil;	
Thereby acknowledging he gave his life	
For love of her and hatred of her foes;	
And, being perfect and without reproach	
God-ward and to the temples of his fathers,	1200
Died, as became his youth, in guiltlessness.	
Touching the said deceased Eteocles	
So much I am commanded to convey.	
But for his brother—Polyneices—ye	
Are to cast forth unburied his remains	
For dogs to gnaw; as a conspirator	
Against the integrity of Cadmus' realm,	
Who would have turned this kingdom upside down,	
Had not a God from heaven braced yonder arm.	
Outlawed in death is he, with the same ban	1210
Wherewith the Gods attached him, when he led	
An army hither to possess the land.	

Therefore it seemeth good that birds of the air
Shall give him burial; and, in dishonour,
He shall have all the honour he hath earned:
No following of slaves to build his tomb;
No keening note of ceremonial woe;
His own kin shall deny him obsequies.
This touching him is formally resolved
By the good lords that govern Cadmus Town.

1220

ANTIGONE

Tell your good lords that I will bury him
If none will help me. If it be dangerous
To bury mine own brother, I am ready!
Shame have I none for this rebellion!
A mighty yearning draws me; that great bond
Which binds us, sprung from the same parent's loins,
And makes us joint-heirs of their misery.
Therefore, my soul, make thou his griefs thine own,
Though he can neither hear nor answer thee,
And be a sister to the slumbering dead!
This body never hollow-bellied wolf
Shall tear and rend! So let no man 'resolve it'!
For I will scoop for him a shallow grave,
Ay, with these woman's hands! I'll fold my robe
And carry him in my lap, and cover him!
Let no 'good lords' 'resolve it' otherwise!
Courage! For what I will I'll find a way!

1230

HERALD

'Tis my most strict command that thou forbear!
Flout not authority!

ANTIGONE

And it is mine
That thou refine not on thy herald's office.

1240

HERALD

Let me say this: a people long oppressed
When they win free, turn savage.

ANTIGONE

Let them be
As savage as you please—he shall have his grave.

HERALD

And wilt thou pay the honours of the grave
To one whom the supreme authority
Holdeth accurst?

ANTIGONE

Alas! The Gods, methinks,
Have meted out to him his meed of honour.

HERALD

For grievous outrage on the commonweal!
He did most wickedly imperil her!

ANTIGONE

Gave back what he received! Evil for evil!

1250

HERALD

To be revenged upon one man, his foe,
He struck at all!

ANTIGONE

So might we wrangle on!
And so should wrangling still have the last word!

HERALD

Then I have done; reckon thine own rede and rue it!

[Exit HERALD.]

CHORUS

What sorrow like thine is!
And ye angry ghosts,
Blood-boltered Erinys,
Loud, loud are your boasts!

Race-wreckers, your feet have not tarried!
The tree-root and branch lies shattered! 1260
The ruins of Oedipus' line
With the dust of its dead shall be scattered!
And how shall my heart incline?
On thy poor corse shall I shed no tear?
Shall I not walk before thy bier
When thou to the grave art carried?

Ah! maugre all pity,
I am afraid!
From the wrath of the city
My souls shrinks dismayed! 1270
New sorrow is here for my grieving!
Yea! for there shall not fail thee
The meed of a multitude's tears!
Thou shalt have many to wail thee,
Lost in the wreck of the years!
And must this poor soul go without his moan
Save the death-song his sister singeth alone?
O bitter past believing!

SEMI-CHORUS

What the city declareth
Be done or forborne! 1280
Little my heart careth—
Too deeply I mourn—
Yea, my sorrow their anger despiseth!
Lead on! Though his people disown him
And no proud funeral pomp he shall have,
Together our hearts shall bemoan him,
Together our hands build his grave!
For to-day goeth by as a tale that is told,
And Time metes new censure, revoking the old,
And Justice her dooms reviseth! 1290

SEMI-CHORUS

Go thy ways! Where my trust is
My mourning shall be!
When the stern soul of Justice
And men's censure agree,

Shall I question or shall I upbraid her?
Nay, rather my dirge shall be chanted
For him who wrought most for his land,
And the city that Cadmus planted,
Under Heaven and Zeus' mighty hand,
When she was like to be cast away,
Foundered far from the light of day
'Neath the wave of the strong invader.

1300

[*Exeunt; one half following ANTIGONE with the body of
POLYNEICES, and the other half ISMENE with the
body of ETEOCLES.*]

PROMETHEUS BOUND

(circa 460 B.C.)

THE PLAY. This great drama was preceded by *Prometheus the Fire-Bringer* and followed by *Prometheus Unbound*. The lesson of the trilogy is that not even benevolence towards men can excuse disobedience to God. It represents a distinct advance in the poet's craft. The entry of the chorus (page 150) is one of the most beautiful things in ancient literature; and the prophecy of Io's wanderings expresses a new interest in the outside world similar to that of the Elizabethan age in England two thousand years later.

THE LEGEND. Prometheus, a Titan, stole fire from heaven for the benefit of the infant human race. For this crime Zeus had him chained to a rock in the Caucasus. With the consent of Zeus he was subsequently delivered by Heracles. Our play, as the title shows, deals only with the second of these episodes. It contains a remarkable reference to the eruption of Etna in 479 B.C.

CHARACTERS

PROMETHEUS

KRATOS and BIA, *ministers of Zeus*

HEPHAESTUS

OCEANUS

HERMES

IO, *daughter of Inachus, King of Argos*

CHORUS OF OCEANIDES

SCENE: *Mountainous country, and in the middle of a deep gorge a rock.*

PROMETHEUS BOUND

*Enter KRATOS and BIA carrying the gigantic form of
PROMETHEUS. HEPHAESTUS follows dejectedly with
hammer, nails, chains, etc.*

KRATOS

Now have we journeyed to a spot of earth
Remote—the Scythian wild, a waste untrod.
And now, Hephaestus, thou must execute
The task our father laid on thee, and fetter
This malefactor to the jagged rocks
In adamantine bonds infrangible;
For thine own blossom of all forging fire
He stole and gave to mortals; trespass grave
For which the Gods have called him to account,
That he may learn to bear Zeus' tyranny
And cease to play the lover of mankind.

10

HEPHAESTUS

Kratos and Bia, for ye twain the hest
Of Zeus is done with; nothing lets you further.
But forcibly to bind a brother God
In chains, in this deep chasm raked by all storms,
I have not courage; yet needs must I pluck
Courage from manifest necessity,
For woe worth him that slights the Father's word.
O high-souled son of Themis sage in counsel,
With heavy heart I must make thy heart heavy,
In bonds of brass not easy to be loosed,
Nailing thee to this crag where no wight dwells,
Nor sound of human voice nor shape of man
Shall visit thee; but the sun-blaze shall roast
Thy flesh; thy hue, flower-fair, shall suffer change;
Welcome will Night be when with spangled robe
She hides the light of day; welcome the sun
Returning to disperse the frosts of dawn.

20

And every hour shall bring its weight of woe
To wear thy heart away; for yet unborn
Is he who shall release thee from thy pain
This is thy wage for loving humankind.
For, being a God, thou dared'st the Gods' ill will,
Preferring, to exceeding honour, Man.
Wherefore thy long watch shall be comfortless,
Stretched on this rock, never to close an eye
Or bend a knee; and vainly shalt thou lift,
With groanings deep and lamentable cries,
Thy voice; for Zeus is hard to be entreated,
As new-born power is ever pitiless.

30
40

KRATOS

Enough! Why palter? Why waste idle pity?
Is not the God Gods loathe hateful to thee?
Traitor to man of thy prerogative?

HEPHAESTUS

Kindred and fellowship are dreaded names.

KRATOS

Questionless; but to slight the Father's word—
How sayest thou?—Is not this fraught with more dread?

HEPHAESTUS

Thy heart was ever hard and overbold.

KRATOS

But wailing will not ease him! Waste no pains
Where thy endeavour nothing profiteth.

HEPHAESTUS

Oh execrable work! loathed handicraft!

50

KRATOS

Why curse thy trade? For what thou hast to do,
Troth, smithcraft is in no wise answerable.

HEPHAESTUS

Would that it were another's craft, not mine!

KRATOS

Why, all things are a burden save to rule
Over the Gods; for none is free but Zeus.

HEPHAESTUS

To that I answer not, knowing it true.

KRATOS

Why, then, make haste to cast the chains about him,
Lest glancing down on thee the Father's eye
Behold a laggard and a loiterer.

HEPHAESTUS

Here are the iron bracelets for his arms.

60

KRATOS

Fasten them round his arms with all thy strength!
Strike with thy hammer! Nail him to the rocks!

HEPHAESTUS

'Tis done! and would that it were done less well!

KRATOS

Harder—I say—strike harder—screw all tight
And be not in the least particular
Remiss, for unto one of his resource
Bars are but instruments of liberty.

HEPHAESTUS

This forearm's fast—a shackle hard to shift.

KRATOS

Now buckle this!—and handsomely! Let him learn
Sharp though he be, he's a dull blade to Zeus.

70

HEPHAESTUS

None can find fault with this—save him it tortures.

KRATOS

Now take thine iron spike and drive it in,
Until it gnaw clean through the rebel's breast.

HEPHAESTUS

Woe 's me, Prometheus, for thy weight of woe!

KRATOS

Still shirking? still a-groaning for the foes
Of Zeus? Anon thou 'lt wail thine own mishap.

HEPHAESTUS

Thou seest what eyes scarce bear to look upon!

KRATOS

I see this fellow getting his deserts!
But strap him with a belt about his ribs.

HEPHAESTUS

I do what I must do: for thee—less words!

80

KRATOS

'Words,' quotha? Aye, and shout 'em if need be.
Come down and cast a ring-bolt round his legs.

HEPHAESTUS

The thing is featly done; and 'twas quick work.

KRATOS

Now with a sound rap knock the bolt-pins home!
For heavy handed is thy task-master.

HEPHAESTUS

So villainous a form vile tongue befits.

KRATOS

Be thou the heart of wax, but chide not me
That I am gruffish, stubborn, and stiff-willed.

HEPHAESTUS

Oh, come away! The tackle holds him fast.

KRATOS

Now, where thou hang'st, insult! Plunder the Gods 90
For creatures of a day! To thee what gift
Will mortals tender to requite thy pains?
The destinies were out miscalling thee
Designer: a designer thou wilt need
From trap so well contrived to twist thee free.

[*Exeunt.*]

PROMETHEUS

O divine air! Breezes on swift bird-wings,
Ye river fountains, and of ocean-waves
The multitudinous laughter! Mother Earth!
And thou all-seeing circle of the sun,
Behold what I, a God, from Gods endure! 100
Look down upon my shame,
The cruel wrong that racks my frame,
The grinding anguish that shall waste my strength,
Till time's ten thousand years have measured out their length!

He hath devised these chains,
The new throned potentate who reigns,
Chief of the chieftains of the Blest. Ah me!
The woe which is and that which yet shall be
I wail; and question make of these wide skies
When shall the star of my deliverance rise. 110

And yet—and yet—exactly I foresee .
All that shall come to pass; no sharp surprise
Of pain shall overtake me; what 's determined
Bear, as I can, I must, knowing the might
Of strong Necessity is unconquerable.

But touching my fate silence and speech alike
 Are unsupportable. For boons bestowed
 On mortal men I am straitened in these bonds.
 I sought the fount of fire in hollow reed
 Hid privily, a measureless resource
 For man, and mighty teacher of all arts.
 This is the crime that I must expiate
 Hung here in chains, nailed 'neath the open sky.

120

Ha! Ha!

What echo, what odour floats by with no sound?
 God-wafted or mortal or mingled its strain?
 Comes there one to this world's end, this mountain-girt ground,
 To have sight of my torment? Or of what is he fain?
 A God ye behold in bondage and pain,
 The foe of Zeus and one at feud with all
 The deities that find
 Submissive entry to the tyrant's hall;
 His fault, too great a love of humankind.
 Ah me! Ah me! what wafture nigh at hand,
 As of great birds of prey, is this I hear?
 The bright air fanned
 Whistles and shrills with rapid beat of wings.
 There cometh nought but to my spirit brings
 Horror and fear.

130

*The OCEANIDES draw near in mid air in their
 winged chariot.*

CHORUS

Put thou all fear away!
 In kindness cometh this array
 On wings of speed to mountain lone,
 Our sire's consent not lightly won.
 But a fresh breeze our convoy brought,
 For loud the din of iron raught
 Even to our sea-caves cold recess,
 And scared away the meek-eyed bashfulness.
 I tarried not to tie my sandal shoe
 But haste, post haste, through air my wingéd chariot flew.

140

PROMETHEUS

Ah me! Ah me!

150

Fair progeny

That many-childed Tethys brought to birth,

Fathered of Ocean old

Whose sleepless stream is rolled

Round the vast shores of earth!

Look on me! Look upon these chains

Wherein I hang fast held

On rocks high-pinnacled,

My dungeon and my tower of dole,

Where o'er the abyss my soul,

160

Sad warder, her unwearied watch sustains!

CHORUS

Prometheus, I am gazing on thee now!

With the cold breath of fear upon my brow,

Not without mist of dimming tears,

While to my sight thy giant stature rears

Its bulk forpined upon these savage rocks

In shameful bonds the linked adamant locks.

For now new steersmen take the helm

Olympian; now with little thought

Of right, on strange, new laws Zeus stablisheth his realm, 170

Bringing the mighty ones of old to naught.

PROMETHEUS

Oh that he had conveyed me

'Neath earth, 'neath hell that swalloweth up the dead;

In Tartarus, illimitably vast

With adamantine fetters bound me fast—

There his fierce anger on me visited,

Where never mocking laughter could upbraid me

Of God or aught beside!

But now a wretch enskied,

A far-seen vane,

180

All they that hate me triumph in my pain.

CHORUS

Who of the Gods is there so pitiless

That he can triumph in thy sore distress?

Who doth not inly groan
 With every pang of thine save Zeus alone?
 But he is ever wroth—not to be bent
 From his resolved intent
 The sons of heaven to subjugate;
 Nor shall he cease until his heart be satiate,
 Or one a way devise
 To hurl him from the throne where he doth monarchize.

190

PROMETHEUS

Yea, of a surety—though he do me wrong,
 Loading my limbs with fetters strong—
 The president
 Of heaven's high parliament
 Shall need me yet to show
 What new conspiracy with privy blow
 Attempts his sceptre and his kingly seat.
 Neither shall words with all persuasion sweet,
 Not though his tongue drop honey, cheat
 Nor charm my knowledge from me; nor duress
 Of menace dire, fear of more grievous pains,
 Unseal my lips, till he have loosed these chains,
 And granted for these injuries redress.

200

CHORUS

High is the heart of thee,
 Thy will no whit by bitter woes unstrung,
 And all too free
 The licence of thy bold, unshackled tongue.
 But fear hath roused my soul with piercing cry!
 And for thy fate my heart misgives me! I
 Tremble to know when through the breakers' roar
 Thy keel shall touch again the friendly shore;
 For not by prayer to Zeus is access won;
 An unpersuadable heart hath Cronos' son.

210

PROMETHEUS

I know the heart of Zeus is hard, that he hath tied
 Justice to his side;
 But he shall be full gentle thus assuaged;

And, the implacable wrath wherewith he raged
 Smoothed quite away, nor he nor I
 Be loth to seal a bond of peace and amity.

220

CHORUS

All that thou hast to tell I pray unfold,
 That we may hear at large upon what count
 Zeus took thee and with bitter wrong affronts: } cf. 142, 4.
 Instruct us, if the telling hurt thee not.

PROMETHEUS

These things are sorrowful for me to speak,
 Yet silence too is sorrow: all ways woe!
 When first the Blessed Ones were filled with wrath
 And there arose division in their midst,
 These instant to hurl Cronos from his throne
 That Zeus might be their king, and these, adverse, 230
 Contending that he ne'er should rule the Gods,
 Then I, wise counsel urging to persuade
 The Titans, sons of Ouranos and Chthon,
 Prevailed not: but, all indirect essays
 Despising, they by the strong hand—effortless,
 Yet by main force—supposed that they might seize
 Supremacy. But me my mother Themis
 And Gaia, one form called by many names,
 Not once alone with voice oracular
 Had prophesied how power should be disposed, 240
 That not by strength neither by violence
 The mighty should be mastered, but by guile.
 Which things by me set forth at large, they scorned,
 Nor graced my motion with the least regard.
 Then, of all ways that offered, I judged best,
 Taking my mother with me, to support,
 No backward friend, the not less cordial Zeus.
 And by my politic counsel Tartarus,
 The bottomless and black, old Cronos hides
 With his confederates. So helped by me, 250
 The tyrant of the Gods, such service rendered
 With ignominious chastisement requites.
 But 'tis a common malady of power
 Tyrannical never to trust a friend.

And now, what ye inquired, for what arraigned
He shamefully entreats me, ye shall know.
When first upon his high, paternal throne
He took his seat, forthwith to divers Gods
Divers good gifts he gave, and parcelled out
His empire, but of miserable men 260
Recked not at all; rather it was his wish
To wipe out man and rear another race:
And these designs none contravened but me.
I risked the bold attempt, and saved mankind
From stark destruction and the road to hell.
Therefore with this sore penance am I bowed,
Grievous to suffer, pitiful to see.
But, for compassion shown to man, such fate
I no wise earned; rather in wrath's despite
Am I to be reformed, and made a show 270
Of infamy to Zeus.

CHORUS

He hath a heart
Of iron, hewn out of unfeeling rock
Is he, Prometheus, whom thy sufferings
Rouse not to wrath. Would I had ne'er beheld them,
For verily the sight hath wrung my heart.

PROMETHEUS

Yea, to my friends a woeful sight am I.

CHORUS

Hast not more boldly in aught else transgressed?

PROMETHEUS

I took from man expectancy of death.

CHORUS

What medicine found'st thou for this malady?

PROMETHEUS

I planted blind hope in the heart of him. 280

CHORUS

A mighty boon thou gavest there to man.

PROMETHEUS

Moreoever, I conferred the gift of fire.

CHORUS

And have frail mortals now the flame-bright fire?

PROMETHEUS

Yea, and shall master many arts thereby.

CHORUS

And Zeus with such misfeasance charging thee—

PROMETHEUS

Torments me with extremity of woe.

CHORUS

And is no end in prospect of thy pains?

PROMETHEUS

None; save when he shall choose to make an end.

CHORUS

How should he choose? What hope is thine? Dost thou
Not see that thou hast erred? But how thou erredst 290
Small pleasure were to me to tell; to thee
Exceeding sorrow. Let it go then: rather
Seek thou for some deliverance from thy woes.

PROMETHEUS

He who stands free with an untrammelled foot
Is quick to counsel and exhort a friend
In trouble. But all these things I know well.
Of my free will, my own free will, I erred,
And freely do I here acknowledge it.
Freeing mankind myself have durance found.
Natheless, I looked not for sentence so dread,

High on this precipice to droop and pine,
 Having no neighbour but the desolate crags.
 And now lament no more the ills I suffer,
 But come to earth and an attentive ear
 Lend to the things that shall befall hereafter.
 Hearken, oh hearken, suffer as I suffer!
 Who knows, who knows, but on some scatheless head,
 Another's, yet for the like woes reserved,
 The wandering doom will presently alight?

CHORUS

Prometheus, we have heard thy call 310
 Not on deaf ears these awful accents fall.
 Lo! lightly leaving at thy words
 My flying car
 And holy air, the pathway of great birds,
 I long to tread this land of peak and scar,
 And certify myself by tidings sure
 Of all thou hast endured and must endure.

*While the winged chariot of the OCEANIDES comes to ground
 their father OCEANUS enters, riding on a monster.*

OCEANUS

Now have I traversed the unending plain
 And unto thee, Prometheus, am I come,
 Guiding this wingèd monster with no rein, 320
 Nor any bit, but mind's firm masterdom.
 And know that for thy grief my heart is sore;
 The bond of kind, methinks, constraineth me;
 Nor is there any I would honour more,
 Apart from kinship, than I reverence thee.
 And thou shalt learn that I speak verity:
 Mine is no smooth, false tongue; for do but show
 How I can serve thee, grieved and outraged thus,
 Thou ne'er shalt say thou hast, come weal, come woe,
 A friend more faithful than Oceanus. 330

PROMETHEUS

How now? Who greets me? What! Art thou too come
 To gaze upon my woes? How could'st thou leave
 The stream that bears thy name, thine antres arched

With native rock, to visit earth that breeds
 The massy iron in her womb? Com'st thou
 To be spectator of my evil lot
 And fellow sympathizer with my woes?
 Behold, a thing indeed to gaze upon!
 The friend of Zeus, co-stablisher of his rule,
 See, by his sentence with what pains I am bowed! 340

OCEANUS

Prometheus, all too plainly I behold:
 And for the best would counsel thee: albeit
 Thy brain is subtle. Learn to know thy heart,
 And, as the times, so let thy manners change,
 For by the law of change a new God rules.
 But, if these bitter, savage, sharp-set words
 Thou ventest, it may be, though he sit throned
 Far off and high above thee, Zeus will hear;
 And then thy present multitude of ills
 Will seem the mild correction of a babe. 350
 Rather, O thou much chastened one, refrain
 Thine anger, and from suffering seek release.
 Stale, peradventure, seem these words of mine:
 Nevertheless, of a too haughty tongue
 Such punishment, Prometheus, is the wage.
 But thou, not yet brought low by suffering,
 To what thou hast of ill would'st add far worse.
 Therefore, while thou hast me for schoolmaster,
 Thou shalt not kick against the pricks; the more
 That an arch-despot who no audit dreads 360
 Rules by his own rough will. And now I leave thee.
 To strive with what success I may command
 For thy deliv'rance. Keep a quiet mind
 And use not over-vehemence of speech—
 Knowest thou not, being exceeding wise,
 A wanton, idle tongue brings chastisement?

PROMETHEUS

I marvel that thou art not in my case,
 Seeing with me thou did'st adventure all.
 And now, I do entreat thee, spare thyself.
 Thou wilt not move him: he's not easy moved. 370
 Take heed lest thou find trouble by the way.

OCEANUS

Thou art a better counsellor to others
Than to thyself—I judge by deeds not words.
Pluck me not back when I would fain set forth.
My oath upon it, Zeus will grant my prayer
And free thee from these pangs.

PROMETHEUS

I tender thee
For this my thanks and ever-during praise.
Certes, no backward friend art thou; and yet
Trouble not thyself; for at the best thy labour
Will nothing serve me—if thou mean'st to serve. 380
Being thyself untrammelled stand thou fast.
For, not to mitigate my own mischance,
Would I see others hap on evil days.
The thought be far from me. I feel the weight
Of Atlas' woes, my brother, in the west
Shouldering the pillar that props heaven and earth,
No wieldly fardel for his arms to fold.
The giant dweller in Cilician dens
I saw and pitied—a terrific shape,
A hundred-headed monster—when he fell, 390
Resistless Typhon who withstood the Gods,
With fearsome hiss of beak-mouth horrible,
While lightning from his eyes with Gorgon-glare
Flashed for the ravage of the realm of Zeus.
But on him came the bolt that never sleeps,
Down-crashing thunder, with emitted fire,
Which shattered him and all his towering hopes
Dashed into ruin; smitten through the breast,
His strength as smoking cinder, lightning-charred.
And now a heap, a helpless, sprawling hulk, 400
He lies stretched out beside the narrow seas,
Pounded and crushed deep under Etna's roots.
But on the mountain-top Hephaestus sits
Forging the molten iron, whence shall burst
Rivers of fire, with red and ravening jaws
To waste fair-fruited, smooth, Sicilian fields.
Such bilious up-boiling of his ire
Shall Typhon vent, with slingstone-showers red-hot,

And unapproachable surge of fiery spray,
Although combusted by the bolt of Zeus.
But thou art not unlearned, nor needest me
To be thy teacher: save thyself the way
Thou knowest and I will fortify my heart
Until the wrathfulness of Zeus abate.

410

OCEANUS

Nay then, Prometheus, art thou ignorant
Words are physicians to a wrath-sick soul?

PROMETHEUS

Yes, if with skill one soften the ripe core,
Not by rough measures make it obdurate.

OCEANUS

Seest thou in warm affection detriment
Or aught untoward in adventuring?

420

PROMETHEUS

A load of toil and a light mind withal.

OCEANUS

Then give me leave to call that sickness mine
Wise men accounted fools attain their ends.

PROMETHEUS

But how if I am galled by thine offence?

OCEANUS

There very palpably thou thrustest home.

PROMETHEUS

Beware lest thou through pity come to broils

OCEANUS

With one established in Omnipotence?

PROMETHEUS

Of him take heed lest thou find heaviness.

OCEANUS

I am schooled by thy calamity, Prometheus!

PROMETHEUS

Pack then! And, prithee, do not change thy mind! 430

OCEANUS

Thou criest 'On' to one in haste to go.
For look, my dragon with impatient wings
Flaps at the broad, smooth road of level air.
Fain would he kneel him down in his own stall.

[Exit OCEANUS. The CHORUS alights and forms a rectangle about the altar.]

CHORAL HYMN

I mourn for thee, Prometheus, minished and brought low,
Watering my virgin cheeks with these sad drops, that flow
From sorrow's rainy fount, to fill soft-lidded eyes
With pure libations for thy fortune's obsequies.
An evil portion that none coveteth hath Zeus
Prepared for thee; by self-made laws established for his use 440
Disposing all, the elder Gods he purposeth to show
How strong is that right arm wherewith he smites a foe.
There hath gone up a cry from earth, a groaning for the fall
Of things of old renown and shapes majestic,
And for thy passing an exceeding bitter groan;
For thee and for thy brother Gods whose honour was thine own:
These things all they who dwell in Asia's holy seat,
Time's minions, mourn and with their groans thy groans repeat.
Yea, and they mourn who dwell beside the Colchian shore,
The hero maids unwedded that delight in war, 450
And Scythia's swarming myriads who their dwelling make
Around the borders of the world, the salt Maeotian lake.
Mourns Ares' stock, that flowers in desert Araby,
And the strong city mourns, the hill-fort planted high,

Near neighbour to huge Caucasus, dread mountaineers
That love the clash of arms, the counter of sharp spears.
Beforetime of all Gods one have I seen in pain,
One only Titan bound with adamantine chain,
Atlas in strength supreme, who groaning stoops, downbent
Under the burthen of the earth and heaven's broad firmament.
Bellows the main of waters, surge with foam-seethed surge 461
Clashing tumultuous; for thee the deep seas chant their dirge;
And Hell's dark under-world a hollow moaning fills;
Thee mourn the sacred streams with all their fountain-rills.

PROMETHEUS

Think not that I for pride and stubbornness
Am silent: rather is my heart the prey
Of gnawing thoughts, both for the past, and now
Seeing myself by vengeance buffeted.
For to these younger Gods their precedence
Who severally determined if not I? 470
No more of that: I should but weary you
With things ye know; but listen to the tale
Of human sufferings, and how at first
Senseless as beasts I gave men sense, possessed them
Of mind. I speak not in contempt of man;
I do but tell of good gifts I conferred.
In the beginning, seeing they saw amiss,
And hearing heard not, but, like phantoms huddled
In dreams, the perplexed story of their days
Confounded; knowing neither timber-work 480
Nor brick-built dwellings basking in the light,
But dug for themselves holes, wherein like ants,
That hardly may contend against a breath,
They dwelt in burrows of their unsunned caves.
Neither of winter's cold had they fix'd sign,
Nor of the spring when she comes decked with flowers,
Nor yet of summer's heat with melting fruits
Sure token: but utterly without knowledge
Moiled, until I the rising of the stars
Showed them, and when they set, though much obscure. 490
Moreover, number, the most excellent
Of all inventions, I for them devised,

And gave them writing that retaineth all,
The serviceable mother of the Muse.
I was the first that yoked unmanaged beasts,
To serve as slaves with collar and with pack,
And take upon themselves, to man's relief,
The heaviest labour of his hands: and I
Tamed to the rein and drove in wheelèd cars
The horse, of sumptuous pride the ornament.
And those sea-wanderers with the wings of cloth,
The shipman's wagons, none but me devised.
These manifold inventions for mankind
I perfected, who, out upon't, have none—
No, not one shift—to rid me of this shame.

500

CHORUS

Thy sufferings have been shameful, and thy mind
Strays at a loss: like to a bad physician
Fallen sick, thou'rt out of heart: nor can'st prescribe
For thine own case the draught to make thee sound.

PROMETHEUS

But hear the sequel and the more admire
What arts, what aids I cleverly evolved.
The chiefest that, if any man fell sick,
There was no help for him, comestible,
Lotion, or potion; but for lack of drugs
They dwindled quite away; until I taught them
To compound draughts and mixtures sanative,
Wherewith they now are armed against disease.
I staked the winding path of divination
And was the first distinguisher of dreams,
The true from false; and voices ominous
Of meaning dark interpreted; and tokens
Seen when men take the road; and augury
By flight of all the greater crook-clawed birds
With nice discrimination I defined;
These, by their nature fair and favourable,
Those, flattered with fair name. And of each sort
The habits I described; their mutual feuds
And friendships and the assemblages they hold.
And of the plumpness of the inward parts,

510

520

What colour is acceptable to the Gods,
The well-streaked liver-lobe and gall-bladder.
Also by roasting limbs well wrapped in fat
And the long chine, I led men on the road
Of dark and riddling knowledge; and I purged
The glancing eye of fire, dim before,
And made its meaning plain. These are my works.
Then, things beneath the earth, aids hid from man,
Brass, iron, silver, gold, who dares to say
He was before me in discovering?
None, I wot well, unless he loves to babble.
And in a single word to sum the whole—
All manner of arts men from Prometheus learned.

CHORUS

Shoot not beyond the mark in succouring man
While thou thyself art comfortless: for I
Am of good hope that from these bonds escaped
Thou shalt one day be mightier than Zeus.

PROMETHEUS

Fate, that brings all things to an end, not thus
Apportioneth my lot: ten thousand pangs
Must bow, ten thousand miseries afflict me
Ere from these bonds I freedom find, for Art
Is by much weaker than Necessity.

CHORUS

Who is the pilot of Necessity?

PROMETHEUS

The Fates triform, and the unforgetting Furies.

CHORUS

So then Zeus is of lesser might than these?

PROMETHEUS

Surely he shall not shun the lot apportioned.

CHORUS

What lot for Zeus save world-without-end reign?

PROMETHEUS

Tax me no further with importunate questions.

CHORUS

O deep the mystery thou shroudest there!

PROMETHEUS

Of aught but this freely thou may'st discourse;
 But touching this I charge thee speak no word; 560
 Nay, veil it utterly: for strictly kept,
 The secret from these bonds shall set me free.

CHORAL HYMN

May Zeus who all things swayeth
 Ne'er wreak the might none stayeth
 On wayward will of mine;
 May I stint not nor waver
 With offerings of sweet savour
 And feasts of slaughtered kine;
 The holy to the holy,
 With frequent feet and lowly 570
 At altar, fane, and shrine,
 Over the Ocean marches,
 The deep that no drought parches,
 Draw near to the divine.
 My tongue the Gods estrange not;
 My firm set purpose change not,
 As wax melts in fire-shine.
 Sweet is the life that lengthens,
 While joyous hope still strengthens,
 And glad, bright thoughts sustain; 580
 But shuddering I behold thee,
 The sorrows that enfold thee
 And all thine endless pain.
 For Zeus thou hast despisèd;
 Thy fearless heart misprizèd

All that his vengeance can,
 Thy wayward will obeying,
 Excess of honour paying,
 Prometheus, unto man.

And oh, belovèd, for this graceless grace 590
 What thanks? What prowess for thy bold essay
 Shall champion thee from men of mortal race,
 The petty insects of a passing day?
 Saw'st not how puny is the strength they spend?
 With few, faint steps walking as dreams and blind,
 Nor can the utmost of their lore transcend
 The harmony of the Eternal Mind.
 These things I learned seeing thy glory dimmed,
 Prometheus. Ah, not thus on me was shed
 The rapture of sweet music, when I hymned 600
 The marriage-song round bath and bridal bed
 At thine espousals, and of thy blood-kin,
 A bride thou chosest, wooing her to thee
 With all good gifts that may a Goddess win,
 Thy father's child, divine Hesione.

Enter IO, crazed and horned.

IO

What land is this? What people here abide?
 And who is he,
 The prisoner of this windswept mountainside?
 Speak, speak to me;
 Tell me, poor caitiff, how did'st thou transgress, 610
 Thus buffeted?
 Whither am I, half-dead with weariness,
 For-wanderèd?
 Ha! Ha!
 Again the prick, the stab of gadfly-sting!
 O earth, earth, hide,
 The hollow shape—Argus—that evil thing—
 The hundred-eyed-
 Earth-born-herdsman! I see him yet; he stalks
 With stealthy pace, 620
 And crafty watch not all my poor wit baulks!
 From the deep place

Of earth that hath his bones he breaketh bound,
 And from the pale
 Of Death, the Underworld, a hell-sent hound
 On the blood-trail,
 Fasting and faint he drives me on before,
 With spectral hand,
 Along the windings of the wasteful shore,
 The salt sea-sand! 630
 List! List! the pipe! how drowsily it shrills!
 A cricket-cry!
 See! See! the wax-webbed reeds! Oh, to these ills
 Ye Gods on high,
 Ye blessed Gods, what bourne? O wandering feet
 When will ye rest?
 O Cronian child, wherein by aught unmeet
 Have I transgressed
 To be yoke-fellow with Calamity?
 My mind unstrung, 640
 A crack-brained lack-wit, frantic mad am I,
 By gadfly stung,
 Thy scourge, that tarres me on with buzzing wing!
 Plunge me in fire—
 Hide me in earth—to deep-sea monsters fling—
 But my desire—
 Kneeling I pray—grudge not to grant, O King!
 Too long a race
 Stripped for the course have I run to and fro;
 And still I chase 650
 The vanishing goal, the end of all my woe;
 Enough have I mourned!
 Hear'st thou the lowing of the maid cow-horned?

PROMETHEUS

How should I hear thee not? Thou art the child
 Of Inachus, dazed with the dizzying fly.
 The heart of Zeus thou hast made hot with love,
 And Hera's curse, even as a runner stripped,
 Pursues thee ever on thine endless round.

IO

How dost thou know my father's name? Impart
 To one like thee 660

A poor, distressful creature, who thou art.
 Sorrow with me,
 Sorrowful one! Tell me, whose voice proclaims
 Things true and sad,
 Naming by all their old, unhappy names,
 What drove me mad—
 Sick, sick—ye Gods—with suffering ye have sent,
 That clings and clings—
 Wasting my lamp of life till it be spent!—
 Crazed with your stings! 670
 Famished I come with trampling and with leaping,
 Torment and shame,
 To Hera's cruel wrath, her craft unsleeping,
 Captive and tame!
 Of all wights woe-begone and fortune-crossed,
 Oh, in the storm
 Of the world's sorrow is there one so lost?
 Speak, godlike form,
 And be in this dark world my oracle!
 Can'st thou not sift 680
 The things to come? Hast thou no art to tell
 What subtle shift,
 Or sound of charming song shall make me well?
 Hide naught of ill!
 But—if indeed thou knowest—prophecy—
 In words that thrill
 Clear-toned through air—what such a wretch as I
 Must yet abide—
 The lost, lost maid that roams earth's kingdoms wide?

PROMETHEUS

What thou would'st learn I will make clear to thee, 690
 Not weaving subtleties, but simple sooth
 Unfolding as the mouth should speak to friends.
 I am Prometheus, giver of fire to mortals.

IO

Oh, universal succour of mankind,
 Sorrowful Prometheus, why art thou punished thus?

PROMETHEUS

I have but now ceased mourning for my griefs.

IO

Wilt thou not grant me then so small a boon?

PROMETHEUS

What is it thou dost ask? Thou shalt know all.

IO

Declare to me who chained thee in this gorge.

PROMETHEUS

The hest of Zeus, but 'twas Hephaestus' hand.

700

IO

But what transgression dost thou expiate?

PROMETHEUS

Let this suffice thee: thou shalt know no more.

IO

Nay, but the end of my long wandering
When shall it be? This too thou must declare.

PROMETHEUS

That it is better for thee not to know.

IO

Oh hide not from me what I have to suffer!

PROMETHEUS

Poor child! Poor child! I do not grudge the gift.

IO

Why, then, art thou so slow to tell me all?

PROMETHEUS

It is not from unkindness; but I fear
Twill break thy heart.

IO

Take thou no thought for me 710
Where thinking thwarteth heart's desire!

PROMETHEUS

So keen
To know thy sorrows! List! and thou shalt learn.

CHORUS

Not till thou hast indulged a wish of mine.
First let us hear the story of her grief
And she herself shall tell the woeful tale.
After, thy wisdom shall impart to her
The conflict yet to come.

PROMETHEUS

So be it, then.
And, Io, thus much courtesy thou owest
These maidens, being thine own father's kin.
For with a moving story of our woes 720
To win a tear from weeping auditors
In nought demeans the teller.

IO

I know not
How fitly to refuse; and at your wish
All ye desire to know I will in plain,
Round terms set forth. And yet the telling of it
Harrows my soul; this winter's tale of wrong,
Of angry Gods and brute deformity,
And how and why on me these horrors swooped.
Always there were dreams visiting by night
The woman's chambers where I slept; and they 730
With flattering words admonished and cajoled me,
Saying: 'Oh lucky one, so long a maid?
And what a match for thee if thou would'st wed!
Why, pretty, here is Zeus as hot as hot—
Love-sick—to have thee! Such a bolt as thou
Hast shot clean through his heart! And he won't rest
Till Cypris help him win thee! Lift not then,

My daughter, a proud foot to spurn the bed
Of Zeus: but get thee gone to meadow deep
By Lerna's marsh, where are thy father's flocks 740
And cattle-folds, that on the eye of Zeus
May fall the balm that shall assuage desire.'
Such dreams oppressed me, troubling all my nights,
Woe's me! till I plucked courage up to tell
My father of these fears that walked in darkness.
And many times to Pytho and Dodona
He sent his sacred missionaries, to inquire
How, or by deed or word, he might conform
To the high will and pleasure of the Gods.
And they returned with slippery oracles, 750
Nought plain, but all to baffle and perplex—
And then at last to Inachus there raught
A saying that flashed clear; the drift, that I
Must be put out from home and country, forced
To be a wanderer at the ends of the earth,
A thing devote and dedicate; and if
I would not, there should fall a thunderbolt
From Zeus, with blinding flash, and utterly
Destroy my race. So spake the oracle
Of Loxias. In sorrow he obeyed, 760
And from beneath his roof drove forth his child.
Grieving as he grieved, and from house and home
Bolted and barred me out. But the high hand
Of Zeus bear hardly on the rein of fate.
And, instantly—even in a moment—mind
And body suffered strange distortion. Horned
Even as ye see me now, and with sharp bite
Of gadfly pricked, with high-flung skip, stark-mad,
I bounded, galloping headlong on, until
I came to the sweet waters of the stream 770
Kerchneian, hard by Lerna's spring. And thither
Artus, the giant herdsman, fierce and fell
As a strong wine unmixed, with hateful cast
Of all his cunning eyes upon the trail,
Gave chase and tracked me down. And there he perished
By violent and sudden doom surprised.
But I with darting sting—the scorpion whip
Of angry Gods—am lashed from land to land.
Thou hast my story, and, if thou can'st tell

What I have still to suffer, speak; but do not
Moved by compassion with a lying tale
Warm my cold heart; no sickness of the soul
Is half so shameful as composèd falsehoods.

780

CHORUS

Off! lost one! off! Horror, I cry!
Horror and misery!
Was this the traveller's tale I craved to hear?
Oh, that mine eyes should see
A sight so ill to look upon! Ah me!
Sorrow, defilement, haunting fear,
Fan my blood cold,
Stabbed with a two-edged sting!
O Fate, Fate, Fate, tremblingly I behold
The plight of Io, thine apportioning!

790

PROMETHEUS

Thou dost lament too soon, and art as one
All fear. Refrain thyself till thou hast heard
What's yet to be.

CHORUS

Speak and be our instructor:
There is a kind of balm to the sick soul
In certain knowledge of the grief to come.

PROMETHEUS

Your former wish I lightly granted ye:
And ye have heard, even as ye desired,
From this maid's lips the story of her sorrow.
Now hear the sequel, the ensuing woes
The damsel must endure from Iëra's hate.
And thou, O seed of Inachæan loins,
Weigh well my words, that thou may'st understand
Thy journey's end. First towards the rising sun
Turn hence, and traverse fields that ne'er felt plough
Until thou reach the country of the Scyths,
A race of wanderers handling the long-bow

800

That shoots afar, and having their habitations 810
Under the open sky in wattled cotes
That move on wheels. Go not thou nigh to them,
But ever within sound of the breaking waves
Pass through their land. And on the left of thee
The Chalybes, workers in iron, dwell.
Beware of them, for they are savages,
Who suffer not a stranger to come near.
And thou shalt reach the river Hybristes,
Well named. Cross not, for it is ill to cross,
Until thou come even unto Caucasus, 820
Highest of mountains, where the foaming river
Blows all its volume from the summit ridge
That o'ertops all. And that star-neighbour'd ridge
Thy feet must climb; and, following the road
That runneth south, thou presently shall reach
The Amazonian hosts that loathe the male,
And shall one day remove from thence and found
Themiscyra hard by Thermodon's stream,
Where on the craggy Salmadessian coast
Waves gnash their teeth, the maw of mariners 830
And stepmother of ships. And they shall lead thee
Upon thy way, and with a right good will.
Then shalt thou come to the Cimmerian Isthmus,
Even at the pass and portals of the sea,
And leaving it behind thee, stout of heart,
Cross o'er the channel of Maeotis' Lake.
For ever famous among men shall be
The story of thy crossing, and the strait
Be called by a new name, the Bosporus,
In memory of thee. Then having left 840
Europa's soil behind thee thou shalt come
To the main land of Asia. What think ye?
Is not the only ruler of the Gods
A complete tyrant, violent to all,
Respecting none? First, being himself a God,
He burneth to enjoy a mortal maid,
And then torments her with these wanderings.
A sorry suitor for thy love, poor girl,
A bitter wooing. Yet having heard so much
Thou art not even in the overture
And prelude of the song. 850

IO

Alas! Oh! Oh!

PROMETHEUS

Thou dost cry out, fetching again deep groans:
What wilt thou do when thou hast heard in full
The evils yet to come?

CHORUS

And wilt thou tell
The maiden something further: some fresh sorrow?

PROMETHEUS

A stormy sea of wrong and ruining.

IO

What does it profit me to live! Oh, why
Do I not throw myself from this rough crag
And in one leap rid me of all my pain?
Better to die at once than live, and all
My days be evil.

860

PROMETHEUS

Thou would'st find it hard
To bear what I must bear: for unto me
It is not given to die—a dear release
From pain; but now of suffering there is
No end in sight till Zeus shall fall.

IO

And shall
Zeus fall? His power be taken from him?—
No matter when if true——

PROMETHEUS

'Twould make thee happy
Methinks, if thou could'st see calamity
Whelm him.

IO

How should it not when all my woes
Are of his sending?

PROMETHEUS

Well, then, thou may'st learn how 870
These things shall be.

IO

Oh, who will snatch away
The tyrant's rod?

PROMETHEUS

Himself by his own vain
And fond imaginings.

IO

But how? Oh, speak—
If the declaring draw no evil down!

PROMETHEUS

A marriage he shall make shall vex him sore.

IO

A marriage? Whether of gods or mortals? Speak!
If this be utterable!

PROMETHEUS

Why dost thou ask
What I may not declare?

IO

And shall he quit
The throne of all the worlds, by a new spouse
Supplanted?

PROMETHEUS

She will bear to him a child,
And he shall be in might more excellent
Than his progenitor. 880

IO

And he will find
No way to parry this strong stroke of fate?

PROMETHEUS

None save my own self—when these bonds are loosed.

IO

And who shall loose them if Zeus wills not?

PROMETHEUS

Of thine own seed. One

IO

How say'st thou? Shall a child
Of mine release thee?

PROMETHEUS

Son of thine, but son
The thirteenth generation shall beget.

IO

A prophecy oracularly dark.

PROMETHEUS

Then seek not thou to know thine own fate.

IO

Nay, 890
Tender me not a boon to snatch it from me.

PROMETHEUS

Of two gifts thou hast asked one shall be thine.

IO

What gifts? Pronounce and leave to me the choice.

PROMETHEUS

Nay, thou art free to choose. Say, therefore, whether
I shall declare to thee thy future woes
Or him who shall be my deliverer.

CHORUS

Nay, but let both be granted! Unto her
That which she chooseth, unto me my choice,
That I, too, may have honour from thy lips.
First unto her declare her wanderings, 900
And unto me him who shall set thee free;
'Tis that I long to know.

PROMETHEUS

I will resist

No further, but to your importunacy
All things which ye desire to learn reveal.
And, Io, first to thee I will declare
Thy far-driven wanderings; write thou my words
In the retentive tablets of thy heart.
When thou hast crossed the flood that flows between
And is the boundary of two continents, 910
Turn to the sun's uprising, where he treads
Printing with fiery steps the eastern sky,
And from the roaring of the Pontic surge
Do thou pass on, until before thee lies
The Gorgonean plain, Kisthene called,
Where dwell the grey-haired three, the Phorcides,
Old, mumbling maids, swan-shaped, having one eye
Betwixt the three, and but a single tooth.
On them the sun with his bright beams ne'er glanceth
Nor moon that lamps the night. Not far from them 920
The sisters three, the Gorgons, have their haunt;
Winged forms, with snaky locks, hateful to man,
Whom nothing mortal looking on can live.
Thus much that thou may'st have a care of these.
Now of another portent thou shalt hear.

Beware the dogs of Zeus that ne'er give tongue,
 The sharp-beaked gryphons, and the one-eyed horde
 Of Arimaspians, riding upon horses,
 Who dwell around the river rolling gold,
 The ferry and the frith of Pluto's port.
 Go not thou nigh them. After thou shalt come 930
 To a far land—a dark-skinned race, that dwell
 Beside the fountains of the sun, whence flows
 The river Aethiops: follow its banks
 Until thou comest to the steep-down slope
 Where from the Bibline mountains Nilus old
 Pours the sweet waters of his holy stream.
 And thou, the river guiding thee, shalt come
 To the three-sided, wedge-shaped land of Nile,
 Where for thyself, Io, and for thy children
 Long sojourn is appointed. If in aught 940
 My story seems to stammer and to err
 From indirectness, ask and ask again
 Till all be manifest. I do not lack
 For leisure, having more than well contents me!

CHORUS

If there be aught that she must suffer yet,
 Or aught omitted in the narrative
 Of her long wanderings, I pray thee speak.
 But if thou hast told all, then grant the boon
 We asked and doubtless thou wilt call to mind.

PROMETHEUS

Nay, she has heard the last of her long journey. 950
 But, as some warrant for her patient hearing,
 I will relate her former sufferings
 Ere she came hither. Much I will omit
 That had detained us else with long discourse
 And touch at once her journey's thus far goal.
 When thou wast come to the Molossian plain
 That lies about the high top of Dodona,
 Where is an oracle and shrine of Zeus
 Thesprotian, and—portent past belief—
 The talking oaks—the same from whom the word 960
 Flashed clear and nothing questionably hailed thee

The destined spouse—ah! do I touch old wounds?—
Of Zeus, honoured above thy sex; stung thence
In torment, where the road runs by the sea,
Thou cam'st to the broad gulf of Rhea, whence
Beat back by a strong wind, thou didst retrace
Most painfully thy course; and it shall be
That times to come in memory of thy passage
Shall call that inlet the Ionian Sea.

Thus much for thee in witness that my mind
Beholdeth more than that which leaps to light.
Now for the things to come; what I shall say
Concerns ye both alike. Return we then
And follow our old track. There is a city
Yclept Canopus, built at the land's end,
Even at the mouth and mounded silt of Nile,
And there shall Zeus restore to thee thy mind
With touch benign and laying on of hands.

970

And from that touch thou shalt conceive and bear
Swarth Epaphus, touch-born; and he shall reap
As much of earth as Nilus watereth
With his broad-flowing river. In descent
The fifth from him there shall come back to Argos,
Thine ancient home, but driven by hard hap,
Two score and ten maids, daughters of one house,
Fleeing pollution of unlawful marriage
With their next kin, who winged with wild desire,
As hawks that follow hard on cushat-doves
Shall harry prey which they should not pursue
And hunt forbidden brides. But God shall be

980

Exceeding jealous for their chastity;
And old Pelasgia, for the mortal thrust
Of woman's hands and midnight murder done
Upon their new-wed lords, shall shelter them;
For every wife shall strike her husband down
Dipping a two-edged broadsword in his blood.
Oh, that mine enemies might wed such wives!
But of the fifty, one alone desire
Shall tame, as with the stroke of charming-wand,
So that she shall not lift her hands to slay
The partner of her bed; yea, melting love
Shall blunt her sharp-set will, and she shall choose
Rather to be called weak and womanly

990

1000

Than the dark stain of blood; and she shall be
 Mother of kings in Argos. 'Tis a tale,
 Were't told in full, would occupy us long.
 For, of her sowing, there shall spring to fame
 The lion's whelp, the archer bold, whose bow
 Shall set me free. This is the oracle
 Themis, my ancient Mother, Titan-born,
 Disclosed to me; but how and in what wise
 Were long to tell, nor would it profit thee.

1010

10

Again they come, again
 The fury and the pain!
 The gangrened wound! The ache of pulses dinned
 With raging throes!
 It beats upon my brain—the burning wind
 That madness blows!
 It pricks—the barb, the hook not forged with heat,
 The gadfly dart!
 Against my ribs with thud of trampling feet
 Hammers my heart!
 And like a bowling wheel mine eyeballs spin,
 And I am flung
 By fierce winds from my course, nor can rein in
 My frantic tongue
 That raves I know not what!—a random tide
 Of words—a froth
 Of muddied waters buffeting the wide,
 High-crested, hateful wave of ruin and God's wrath! 1030
 [*Exit raving.*]

1020

CHORAL HYMN

I hold him wise who first in his own mind
 This canon fixed and taught it to mankind—
 True marriage is the union that mates
 Equal with equal; not where wealth emasculates,
 Or mighty lineage is magnified,
 Should he who earns his bread look for a bride.
 Therefore, grave mistresses of fate, I pray
 That I may never live to see the day
 When Zeus takes me for his bedfellow; or I
 Draw near in love to husband from on high.

1040

For I am full of fear when I behold
 Io, the maid no human love may fold,
 And her virginity disconsolate,
 Homeless and husbandless by Hera's hate.
 For me, when love is level, fear is far.
 May none of all the Gods that greater are
 Eye me with his unshunnable regard;
 For in that warfare victory is hard,
 And of that plenty cometh emptiness. .
 What should befall me then I dare not guess; 1050
 Nor whither I should flee that I might shun
 The craft and subtlety of Cronos' Son.

PROMETHEUS

I tell thee that the self-willed pride of Zeus
 Shall surely be abased; that even now
 He plots a marriage that shall hurl him forth
 Far out of sight of his imperial throne
 And kingly dignity. Then, in that hour,
 Shall be fulfilled, nor in one tittle fail,
 The curse wherewith his father Cronos cursed him,
 What time he fell from his majestic place 1060
 Established from of old. And such a stroke
 None of the Gods save me could turn aside.
 I know these things shall be and on what wise.
 Therefore let him secure him in his seat,
 And put his trust in airy noise, and swing
 His bright, two-handed, blazing thunderbolt,
 For these shall nothing stead him, nor avert
 Fall insupportable and glory humbled.
 A wrestler of such might he maketh ready
 For his own ruin; yea, a wonder, strong 1070
 In strength unmatchable; and he shall find
 Fire that shall set at naught the burning bolt
 And blasts more dreadful that o'er-crow the thunder.
 The pestilence that scourgeth the deep seas
 And shaketh solid earth, the three-pronged mace,
 Poseidon's spear, a mightier shall scatter;
 And when he stumbleth striking there his foot,
 Fallen on evil days, the tyrant's pride
 Shall measure all the miserable length
 That parts rule absolute from servitude. 1080

CHORUS

Methinks the wish is father to the thought
And whets thy railing tongue.

PROMETHEUS

Not so: the wish
And the accomplishment go hand in hand.

CHORUS

Then must we look for one who shall supplant
And reign instead of Zeus?

PROMETHEUS

Calamity
Far, far more grievous shall bow down his neck

CHORUS

Hast thou no fear venting such blasphemy?

PROMETHEUS

What should I fear who have no part nor lot
In doom of dying?

CHORUS

But he might afflict thee
With agony more dreadful, pain beyond
These pains.

1090

PROMETHEUS

Why let him if he will!
All evils I foreknow.

CHORUS

Ah, they are wise
Who do obeisance, prostrate in the dust,
To the implacable, eternal Will.

PROMETHEUS

Go thou and worship; fold thy hands in prayer,
 And be the dog that licks the foot of power!
 Nothing care I for Zeus; yea, less than naught!
 Let him do what he will, and sway the world
 His little hour; he has not long to lord it
 Among the Gods.

Oh! here his runner comes!
 The upstart tyrant's lackey! He'll bring news,
 A message, never doubt it, from his master.

1100

Enter HERMES.

HERMES

You, the sophistical rogue, the heart of gall,
 The renegade of heaven—to short-lived men
 Purveyor of prerogatives and titles—
 Fire-thief! Dost hear me? I've a word for thee.
 Thou'rt to declare—this is the Father's pleasure—
 These marriage-feasts of thine, whereof thy tongue
 Rattles a-pace, and by the which his greatness
 Shall take a fall. And look you rede no riddles,
 But tell the truth, in each particular
 Exact. I am not to sweat for thee, Prometheus,
 Upon a double journey. And thou seest
 Zeus by thy dark defiance is not moved.

1110

PROMETHEUS

A very solemn piece of insolence
 Spoken like an underling of the Gods! Ye are young!
 Ye are young! New come to power! And ye suppose
 Your towered citadel Calamity
 Can never enter! Ah, and have not I
 Seen from those pinnacles the twofold fall
 Of tyrants? And the third, who his brief 'now'
 Of lordship arrogates, I shall see yet
 By lapse most swift, most ignominious,
 Sink to perdition. And dost thou suppose
 I crouch and cower in reverence and awe
 To Gods of yesterday? I fail of that

1120

So much, the total all of space and time
Bulks in between. Take thyself hence and count
Thy toiling steps back by the way thou camest,
In nothing wiser for thy questionings.

1130

HERMES

This is that former stubbornness of thine
That brought thee hither to foul anchorage.

PROMETHEUS

Mistake me not; I would not, if I might,
Change my misfortunes for thy vassalage.

HERMES

Oh! better be the vassal of this rock
Than born the trusty messenger of Zeus!

PROMETHEUS

I answer insolence, as it deserves,
With insolence. How else should it be answered?

HERMES

Surely; and, being in trouble, it is plain
You revel in your plight.

PROMETHEUS

Revel, forsooth!
I would my enemies might hold such revels
And thou amongst the first.

1140

HERMES

Dost thou blame me
For thy misfortunes?

PROMETHEUS

I hate all the Gods,
Because, having received good at my hands,
They have rewarded me with evil.

HERMES

This

Proves thee stark mad!

PROMETHEUS

Mad as you please, if hating
Your enemies is madness.

CHORUS

Were all well
With thee, thou'dst be insufferable!

PROMETHEUS

Alas!

HERMES

Alas, that Zeus knows not that word, Alas!

PROMETHEUS

But ageing Time teacheth all knowledge.

HERMES

Time

1150

Hath not yet taught thy rash, imperious will
Over wild impulse to win mastery.

PROMETHEUS

Nay: had Time taught me that, I had not stooped
To bandy words with such a slave as thou.

CHORUS

This, then, is all thine answer; thou 'lt not speak
One syllable of what our Father asks.

PROMETHEUS

Oh, that I were a debtor to his kindness!
I would requite him to the uttermost!

HERMES

A cutting speech! You take me for a boy
Whom you may taunt and tease.

PROMETHEUS

Why, art thou not 1160
A boy—a very booby—to suppose
Thou wilt get aught from me? There is no wrong
However shameful, nor no shift of malice
Whereby Zeus shall persuade me to unlock
My lips until these shackles be cast loose.
Therefore let lightning leap with smoke and flame,
And all that is be beat and tossed together,
With whirl of feathery snowflakes and loud crack
Of subterranean thunder; none of these 1170
Shall bend my will or force me to disclose
By whom 'tis fated he shall fall from power.

HERMES

What good can come of this? Think yet again!

PROMETHEUS

I long ago have thought and long ago
Determined.

HERMES

Patience! patience! thou rash fool!
Have so much patience as to school thy mind
To a right judgment in thy present troubles.

PROMETHEUS

Lo, I am rockfast, and thy words are waves
That weary me in vain. Let not the thought
Enter thy mind, that I in awe of Zeus
Shall change my nature for a girl's, or beg 1180
The Loathed beyond all loathing—with my hands
Spread out in woman's fashion—to cast loose
These bonds; from that I am utterly removed.

HERMES

I have talked much, yet further not my purpose;
 For thou art in no whit melted or moved
 By my prolonged entreaties: like a colt
 New to the harness thou dost back and plunge,
 Snap at thy bit and fight against the rein.
 And yet thy confidence is in a straw;
 For stubbornness, if one be in the wrong,
 Is in itself weaker than naught at all.
 See now, if thou wilt not obey my words,
 What storm, what triple-crested wave of woe
 Unshunnable shall come upon thee. First,
 This rocky chasm shall the Father split
 With earthquake thunder and his burning bolt,
 And he shall hide thy form, and thou shalt hang
 Bolt upright, dandled in the rock's rude arms.
 Nor till thou hast completed thy long term
 Shalt thou come back into the light; and then
 The wingèd hound of Zeus, the tawny eagle,
 Shall violently fall upon thy flesh
 And rend it as 'twere rags; and every day
 And all day long shall thine unbidden guest
 Sit at thy table, feasting on thy liver
 Till he hath gnawn it black. Look for no term
 To such an agony till there stand forth
 Among the Gods one who shall take upon him
 Thy sufferings and consent to enter hell
 Far from the light of Sun, yea, the deep pit
 And murk of Tartarus, for thee. Be advised;
 This is no stuffed speech framed to frighten thee
 But woeful truth. For Zeus knows not to lie
 And every word of this shall be fulfilled.
 Look sharply to thyself then: weigh my words
 And do not in thy folly think self-will
 Better than prudent counsel.

1190

1200

1210

CHORUS

To our mind

The words of Hermes fail not of the mark.
 For he enjoins thee to let self-will go
 And follow after prudent counsels. Him
 Hearken; for error in the wise is shame.

1220

PROMETHEUS

These are stale tidings I foreknew;
Therefore, since suffering is the due
A foe must pay his foes,
Let curléd lightnings clasp and clash
And close upon my limbs: loud crash
The thunder, and fierce throes
Of savage winds convulse calm air:
The embowelled blast earth's roots uptear
And toss beyond its bars,
The rough surge, till the roaring deep
In one devouring deluge sweep
The pathway of the stars!
Finally, let him fling my form
Down whirling gulfs, the central storm
Of being; let me lie
Plunged in the black Tartarean gloom;
Yet—yet—his sentence shall not doom
This deathless self to die!

1230

HERMES

These are the workings of a brain
More than a little touched; the vein
Of voluble ecstasy!
Surely he wandereth from the way,
His reason lost, who thus can pray!
A mouthing madman he!
Therefore, O ye who court his fate,
Rash mourners—ere it be too late
And ye indeed are sad
For vengeance spurring hither fast—
Hence! lest the bellowing thunderblast
Like him should strike you mad!

1240

1250

CHORUS

Words which might work persuasion speak
If thou must counsel me; nor seek
Thus, like a stream in spate,
To uproot mine honour. Dost thou dare
Urge me to baseness! I will bear

With him all blows of fate;
 For false forsakers I despise;
 At treachery my gorge doth rise:
 I spew it forth with hate!

1260

HERMES

Only—with ruin on your track—
 Rail not at fortune; but look back
 And these my words recall;
 Neither blame Zeus that he hath sent
 Sorrow no warning word forewent!
 Ye labour for your fall
 With your own hands! Not by surprise
 Nor yet by stealth, but with clear eyes,
 Knowing the thing ye do,
 Ye walk into the yawning net
 That for the feet of fools is set
 And Ruin spreads for you.

1270

[Exit.

PROMETHEUS

The time is past for words; earth quakes
 Sensibly: hark! pent thunder rakes
 The depths, with bellowing din
 Of echoes rolling ever nigher:
 Lightnings shake out their locks of fire;
 The dust cones dance and spin;
 The skipping winds, as if possessed
 By faction—north, south, east, and west,
 Puff at each other; sea
 And sky are shook together: Lo!
 The swing and fury of the blow
 Wherewith Zeus smiteth me
 Sweepeth apace, and, visibly,
 To strike my heart with fear. See, see,
 Earth, awful Mother! Air,
 That shedd'st from the revolving sky
 On all the light they see thee by,
 What bitter wrongs I bear!

1280

1290

[The scene closes with earthquake and thunder, in the midst
 of which PROMETHEUS and the DAUGHTERS OF
 OCEANUS sink into the abyss.

THE ORESTEIA

Agamemnon, Choephoroe, Eumenides

(458 B.C.)

THE TRILOGY. These three plays together form one of the supreme masterpieces of human genius, despite the fact that scope for human drama is severely limited by the presence of gods at the root of every action. Aeschylus has now revealed himself as a master of characterization, especially in the person of Clytaemnestra. He also attempts for the first time to bring out character in minor parts, for the watchman in *Agamemnon* and the nurse in *Choephoroe* seem to have been drawn from life.

THE LEGEND. Tantalus, the son of Zeus, had revealed the secrets of the gods, and was punished accordingly. His son Pelops married Hippodamia and thereby became King of Pisa in Elis. Later he slew Myrtilus, his charioteer; and this guilt of blood gave rise to the terrible strife between his two sons Atreus and Thyestes. Agamemnon, son of Atreus, obtained a fair wind for his fleet on its way to Troy by the sacrifice of his daughter Iphigenia. Aeschylus' trilogy opens with the return of Agamemnon, whose wife Clytaemnestra has conspired with Aegisthus, son of Thyestes, to avenge the one her daughter, the other his father. In the *Choephoroe* Agamemnon's son Orestes fulfils the undeniable duty of avenging his father's murderess, but thereby rouses the Eumenides, or Furies, personifications both of a guilty conscience and of Clytaemnestra's dying curse. In the *Eumenides* we see him purified by Apollo and, at Athena's instigation, absolved from his unnatural crime of matricide by the court of Areopagus. In return, the Eumenides are given a shrine beneath the hill of Ares, to which they descend amid flaming torches and a solemn hymn.

AGAMEMNON

CHARACTERS

AGAMEMNON, *King of Argos*

CLYTAEMNESTRA, *wife of Agamemnon*

AEGISTHUS, *son of Thyestes*

CASSANDRA, *a Trojan prophetess, daughter of Priam*

WATCHMAN

HERALD

CHORUS OF ARGIVE ELDERS

SCENE: *The palace of Argos.*

AGAMEMNON

WATCHMAN

I have made suit to Heaven for release
A twelvemonth long from this hard service, here
At watch on the Atreidae's roof to lie
As if these arms were paws and I a dog.
I know the nightly concourse of the stars
And which of the sky's bright regents bring us storm,
Which summer; when they set, and their uprisings.
Once more on guard I look for the signal brand,
The flash of fire that shall bring news from Troy
And bruit her fall: so absolute for hope 10
Is woman's heart strong with a man's resolve.

And, now the dewy, vast and vagrant night
Is all my lodging, never visited
By dreams; for Fear, not Slumber, stands fast by,
So that sound sleep may never latch my lids;
And would I sing or whistle, physicking
The drowsy sense with music's counter-charm,
Tears in my voice, my song soon sinks to sighs
For the changed fortunes of this house, no more,
As whilome, ruled and wrought with excellence. 20
Oh, that the hour were come for my release!
Oh, for the gloom's glad glow of herald-fire!

[*The Beacon shines out on Mt Arachne.*

Brave lantern! Out of darkness bringing bright 26
Day! Jolly dance and jocund revelry
To all broad Argos for this fair windfall!
Oho! Below there! Ho!
Mount, Agamemnon's wife, starlike from sleep,
Ascend, and wake the palace with thy rouse!

For by this fiery courier Ilium
 Is taken! Heigh! but I will trip it first! 30
 This is king's luck, but it shall vantage me!
 This bully brand hath thrown me sixes three!

Oh, good to cherish my King's hand in mine
 When he comes home and the household hath a head!
 But not a whisper more; the thresher-ox
 Hath trampled on my tongue. And yet these walls
 Could tell a plain tale. Give me a man that knows,
 And I 'll discourse with him; else am I mute
 And all my memory oblivion.

[*Exit.*

Enter CHORUS in procession.

CHORUS

Nine years have fled on Time's eternal wings 40 40
 And now the tenth is wellnigh flown,
 Since the Atreidae, of this twofold throne,
 By grace of God, the double-sceptred kings—
 Prince Menelaus, Priam's adversary,
 And Agamemnon—from our coast
 Weighed anchor with a thousand ships,
 Mustering the valour of the Argive host.
 Their hearts were hot within them, from their lips
 Thundered the battle-cry,
 Like eagles' scream, when round and round they row, 50
 High o'er their nest in solitary woe,
 Because their eyasses are ta'en,
 And all their watch was vain,
 And all their labour lost.
 But One above, Apollo, Pan, or Zeus
 Shall, at the voice of their despair,
 Pitying his co-mates of the cloudless air,
 Send the Destroying Angel, that pursues
 With penal pangs the feet that have transgressed.
 And so One mightier, Zeus of Host and Guest, 60
 The sons of Atreus 'gainst false Paris sent;
 And, for a wife of many husbands wooed

Ordains War's tourney in long-drawn prelude,
 Knapping of spears, knees in the dust down-bent,
 For Greek and Trojan, ere His wrath be spent.
 Now, as it may, the quarrel goes;
 Fate shapes the close;
 None shall appease with cups or fire to faggot laid
 For sacrifice unburnt the stubborn wrath unstayed.

We, with old limbs outworn, 70
 Were left behind, unworthy of the fray;
 A staff our stay,
 Our strength a babe's newborn
 For pith of young bones potent over all
 Is eld's compeer, a puny chief;
There is no room for Ares, stark and tall:
 And with the yellowing leaf
 Life's last must tread the three-foot way;
 A babe, a dream stolen forth into the day.
 But thou, Tyndareus' daughter, Queen · 83 · 80
 Clytaemnestra, what 's this stir?
 What news? What harbinger
 Hath thine intelligencer been,
 That thou hast passed the word for sacrifice?
 No altar, none, in all the City's liberties,
 Whether to God of Sky or Earth or Street
 Or Entry vowed,
 But is ablaze with gifts.
 And, from all quarters, even to the abysm
 Of night, the dazzling cresset lifts 90
 An odorous cloud,
 Exceeding pure and comforting and sweet,
 With holy chrism
 Of nard and frankincense anointed o'er;
 The richest unguents of the royal store.
 If there is aught
 Thou can'st or may'st declare,
 Speak on, and be physician to my thought,
 Which oft is sick, and oft
 When Hope from these brave altars leaps aloft, 100
 Biddeth good-bye to Cark and Care.

[*The CHORUS forms a rectangle about the altar.*]

CHORAL HYMN

Now am I minstrel and master 104
Of music to chant the Lay
Of the Token, the Mighty Wonder,
That met them on their way,

These two kings ripe in manhood.
I am old, but in me bloweth strong
The wind of God, the rapture
That girds me with valiance for song.

Tell then, my tongue, of the omen 110
That sped 'gainst the Teucrian land
The Achaeans' twi-throned chieftains,
With spear and vengeful hand.

Lords of the Youth of Hellas,
Right well did they agree,
And the king of the birds these sea-kings
Bade launch and put to sea.

Lo, a black eagle sheen; and, lo,
With him an eagle pied,
By the King's tents, in royal show 120
Lit on the spear-hand side.

A hare their meat, all quick with young,
Ta'en, her last doublings o'er.
*Be Sorrow, Sorrow's burden sung,
But crown Joy conqueror!*

Thereat the wise war-prophet 122
Right well applied his art;
Knowing the sons of Atreus
Were men of diverse heart,

In the pair that devoured the trembler 130
He read by his deep lore
A symbol of the royal twain
That led the host to war.

And thus he spake: 'Long leaguer,
 But Priam's city shall fall
 At last, her cattle and commons
 Butchered without her wall;

'Come there from Heaven no wrath-cloud's lower
 To dull with dark alloy
 The mighty bit that's forged with power, 140
 The host that bridles Troy.

'For wrung with ruth is Artemis,
 White flower of maidenhood,
 Wroth with her Father's wingèd hounds,
 That shed the trembler's blood,

'Poor doe, that limped with wombèd young:
 That meat she doth abhor.
Be Sorrow, Sorrow's burden sung,
But crown Joy conqueror!

'Fair One, as thy love can bless 140
 Little whelps as weak as dew
 Of the ravening lioness;
 And at breast all beastlings small
 Shield through forests virginal;
 Wingèd weird that fair doth show
 And yet darkly worketh woe,
 To some happy end ensue!
 And, O Healer, hear my prayer,
 Lest in wrath the Goddess rouse
 Baffling winds that will not change, 160
 All the Danaan fleet laid by;
 Speeding that unlawful, strange,
 Unfestal feast, that rite accursed,
 Of a quarrel inly nursed,
 To a true man perilous,
 The abhorred artificer.
 For, behold, within the house
 Coiled and fanged Conspiracy
 Turns to strike with forkèd tongue,
 Mindful of her murdered young.' 170

So thundered the voice of Calchas,
 From birds with doom in their wings,
 Encountered by the marching host,
 Telling the Fate of Kings.

Tuned to the prophet's bodeful tongue,
 Let your song sink and soar.
*Be Sorrow, Sorrow's burden sung,
 But crown Joy conqueror!*

Zeus—whosoe'er He be, Whose state excels 160
 All language syllables, 180
 Knowing not so much
 As whether He love that name or love it not;
 Zeus—while I put all knowledge to the touch,
 And all experience patiently assay,
 I find no other name to heave away
 The burden of unmanageable thought.

The sometime greatest wrangler of them all
 Hath wrestled to his fall;
 His day is done,
 He hath no name, his glory's lustreless. 190
 He that doth all outwrestle, all outrun,
 Hath whelmed the next that rose up huge and strong.
 But if Zeus' triumph be thy victory-song,
 Thou shalt be founded in all Soothfastness.

He maketh men to walk in Wisdom's ways;
 In Suffering He lays
 Foundations deep
 Of Knowledge. At the heart remembered Pain,
 As of a wound that bleeds, waketh in sleep.
 Though we reject her, Wisdom finds a road. 200
 Then 'tis a gift untenderly bestowed
 By Thronèd Spirits that austere reign.

So with the Elder Captain of the power 183
 Achaean in that hour;
 No blame he cast
 On prophet or seer, but bowed him to the blow;

What time they had no meat to stay their fast,
 And all their ships lay idle, straitened sore,
 Where betwixt Chalcis and the hither shore
 The tides of Aulis battle to and fro. 210

Strong winds from Strymon ill inaction brought,
 Lean fast and layings-up of little ease,
 With waste of ships and tackle; yea, there wrought
 In men's minds wilderment of weltering seas;
 Day like to day, and hour on changeless hour
 Fretted of Argive chivalry the flower.

But when was mooted to the Chiefs a way
 To work a calm more dread than tempest is,
 And clarion-voiced the Prophet in that day
 Thundered, unpityingly—'Artemis'— 220
 The Atreidae with their sceptres smote the earth,
 Nor could keep back their tears; and thus in birth

The Elder spake, and gave their sorrow vent: 205
 'It were a heavy doom to disobey;
 And heavy, if my Child, the ornament
 And glory of my house, I needs must slay,
 A Father's slaughterous hands foully imbrued,
 Hard by the altar, with her maiden blood.'

'What choice is here, where all is ill?' he cried;
 'Am I to leave the vessels to their fate? 230
 Am I to lose the friends with me allied?
 Lo, now a sacrifice which shall abate
 Storm-winds with blood of victim virginal
 Law sanctions; they press hard; then God mend all!'

But, once he let Necessity make fast 217-
 Her yoke, no longer chafing to be galled,
 His altered spirit, leaning to the blast,
 Swept on, unblest, unholy, unappalled.
 For a false wisdom first,
 Being indeed a madness of the mind, 240
 Tempts with a thought accursed,
 And then enures to wrong the wretch of human kind.
 Not backward now, but desperately bold,
 The slayer of his Child behold,

That armed Vengeance woman's rape chastise,
And storm-stayed ships sail free for that rich sacrifice.

To those stern judges, absolute for war, 227 -
Her prayers were nothing, nor her piteous cry,
'Father, father,' pleading evermore,
Nor womanhood nor young virginity: 250
But after uttered prayer
He bade who served the sacrifice be bold;
In her long robe that flowed so fair
Seize her amain, and high above the altar hold
All laxed and drooping, as men hold a kid;
And, that she might not curse his house, he bid
Lock up her lovely lips and mew the sound
Of her sweet voice with curb of dumbing bridle bound.

Her saffron robe let fall, 234 .
She smote her slayers all 260
With eye-glance piteous, arrowily keen;
And, still and fair as form in picture seen,
Would speak. Oh, in her father's hall,
His guests among,
When the rich board
Was laden with good cheer,
How often had she sung;
And when the third thank-offering was poured,
With girl's voice virginal and clear
Her father's paean, hymned with holy glee, 270
Had graced how often and how lovingly!

Thereafter what befell 248 -
I saw not, neither tell;
Only, the craft of Calchas cannot fail;
For Justice, casting Suffering in the scale,
Her balance-poise imponderable
With Knowledge trims.
What 's far away
Thou 'lt know when it is nigh;
But greet not Sorrow, till she swims 280
Full into ken, nor make a fool's haste to sigh;
She comes, clear-seen with morning-ray.
And yet I look to see a happier hour,
As doth the wishful Queen, our Apia's lone watch-tower.

Enter CLYTAEMNESTRA.

My duty, Clytaemnestra, brings me here, 252 -
 And that just awe which is his consort's right
 When the king's throne stands empty of its lord.
 'Twould ease my old heart much might I but know
 The meaning of these sacrificial fires.
 Are they for good news had, or hope of good? 290
 I ask, but, if thou art not free to speak,
 I am no malcontent, I cavil not.

CLYTAEMNESTRA

You know the saw: 'Good Night bring forth Good Morrow'; 264 -
 Well, here is happiness surpassing hope:
 The Argive power hath taken Priam's city.

CHORUS

Have taken—troth, thy words have taken wing;
 I think my unfaith scared them.

CLYTAEMNESTRA

Troy is taken;
 Troy—do you mark me?—in the Achaeans' hands.

CHORUS

Oh, joy! too sweet, too sudden! It draws tears 270 -
 From these old eyes.

CLYTAEMNESTRA

Indeed, they speak for thee; 300
 They vouch a loyal heart.

CHORUS

But is it true?
 And hast thou any proof?

CLYTAEMNESTRA

Oh, proof enough—
 Or we are gulled by God.

CHORUS

Whether art thou
In credulous mood under the power of dreams?

CLYTAEMNESTRA

'Tis not my way to noise abroad a nothing
That nods to me in sleep.

CHORUS

Then has a tale
Wing-swift made fat your hope?

CLYTAEMNESTRA

You rate me low, 277
You reckon me a giddy girl.

CHORUS

How long
Is 't since the town was taken?

CLYTAEMNESTRA

This same night
That 's now in travail with the birth of day.

310

CHORUS

Who was the nimble courier that could bring
The news so quickly?

CLYTAEMNESTRA

Hephaestus; his light 281 -
Shone out of Ida; onwards then it streamed,
Beacon to beacon, like a fiery mail,
Posting the news. Ida to Hermes' Ridge
In Lemnos; thence steep Athos, Zeus' own hill,
Caught from the isle the mighty brand. Uplift
It decked the broad deep with a robe of light,
Journeying in strength, journeying in joy. It smote,
All golden-glancing, like the sun in Heaven,

320

Makistos' warder-towers. Whereat the watch,
 Nothing unready, nothing dazed with sleep,
 Over Euripus' race its coming told
 To far Messapion's sentinels. And they
 Sent up from crackling heather old and dry
 Answering glare, that flashed the tidings on.
 In speed unspent, in power undimmed, it sailed
 Across Asopus' plain, like bright moon-beam;
 Then on Cithaeron's precipice woke fresh
 Response of missive fire. The men on guard 330
 Hailed that far traveller and denied him not,
 Kindling the mightiest flare of all. It leaped
 Gorgopis' Lake; swept Aegiplanctus; bade
 No dallying with its rescript, writ in fire.
 Instant shook out a great, curled beard of flame,
 Luxuriant, that flung a glow beyond
 The cape that looks on the Saronic Gulf.
 Then down it dropped; on near Arachne's crag
 Its long flight stayed; till on this palace-roof
 Of Atreus' line yon ray of glory fell, 340
 Of Ida's parent beacon not unsired.
 This is my torch-race and the ordering of it;
 Rally on rally plenished with new fire.
 And he 's the winner who ran first, and last.
 Here 's proof for you, here is your warranty,
 The which my husband sent me out of Troy.

CHORUS

Lady, I 'll to my prayers; but satisfy 317-
 My wonder first; then I will thank the Gods:
 Tell me, as thou know'st how, the tale again,
 Again and more at large.

CLYTAEMNESTRA

The Achaeans hold 320 350
 Troy Town to-day; and there is heard within
 Her walls, methinks, sounds that are ill to mix.
 Pour oil and eisel in the selfsame crock
 And they will part unkindly. Even so,
 Two voices are there, each distinguishable,
 Both vocal of diversities of fate.

Here there are fallings-down about the dead,
 Dead husbands and dead brothers; here are sires
 Unchilded now, old, sad, and free no more,
 Lifting the voice of grief for their best-beloved. 360
 And there night-straggling Rapine sits him down
 In after-battle weariness, and breaks
 His fast on what the town affords; not now
 Quartered by rote, but as fortune of war
 Deals each; in the homes of Troy, the captive-homes,
 They lie at ease: not under frosty stars,
 In dew-drenched bivouacs, how blest shall be
 Their sleep, no guard to mount, all the night long!
 Now, if they order them with reverence
 To the Gods of the fallen city and her shrines, 370
 They shall not spoil to be again despoiled.
 Let them not lust after forbidden prey;
 For it importeth much they come safe home,
 Now that their course bends hither. If they come
 Free from offence to Heaven, the wound yet green
 For those that we have lost shall dress itself
 In smiles to welcome them; except for Fate;
 Except there fall some sudden stroke of Fate.
 Well, now I have possessed you of my thoughts;
 A woman's thoughts, but one who would have good 380
 Mount to her triumph, without let or stay.
 Much hath matured right well, and 'twere to me
 A delicate joy to gather in the fruit.

CHORUS

Lady, thou surely hast a woman's heart 351 -
 But a man's sense withal. I doubt no more,
 Nor longer will defer my thanks to Heaven;
 For all the toil and the long strain of war
 There hath been dealt right noble recompense.

[Exit CLYTAEMNESTRA.]

King Zeus, and Night, the friendly Night, 355
 Our Lady of the Stars, that dropped, 390
 With slow evanishing of light,
 A veil that Troy's tall towers o'ertopped,

Till, tangled in the fatal fold,
 The strong were as the weak and small,
 When Thraldom her deep drag-net trolled
 And Ruin at one draught took all.

Because these mighty works He wrought
 'Gainst Paris, who so sore transgressed,
 I bend, I bow in solemn thought
 To Zeus, the God of Host and Guest.

400

Long time he bent his bow, nor sped
 A random shot that deals no scars,
 Of feeble length, or overhead
 Ranging among the untroubled stars.

CHORAL HYMN

Now may men say 367 -
 '*Zeus smote them*'; from the deed
 On to the doom so plain God's footprints lead,
 Thou canst not miss thy way.
 Now shines the event,
 His rescript graven in its accomplishment.

410

There is a place
 Inviolably fair;
 There is a Shrine thou shalt not enter; there
 Thrones the Immaculate Grace.
 'Tush! Enter, tread it down,' quoth one unwise,
 'What list the Gods your lovely Sanctities?'

Blasphemer! Shall not Death,
 Death by the Sword of God,
 Still the bold heart and stop the violent breath?
 Have not the bloody feet of Havoc trod
 Those marble mansions in the dust
 Where Glory swelled and overflowed
 Beyond the comely mean and just?
 Oh, give me Wisdom, with such Wealth in store
 As I may safely hold, I will not ask for more.

420

He hath no ramp where he may turn
 That, drunkenly, in mere despite
 And wanton pride the seat of Justice stern,
 Even to the grunsel-edge eterne,
 Dings down and tramples out of sight. 430

To force the plot 385
 That her dam, Death, hath hatched,
 Temptation cometh, that foul witch unmatched;
 Whoso resisteth not
 Her dangerous lure,
 There is no herb of grace can work his cure,
 Nor any shift
 To hide the gleaming woe;
 When that pale spot, that did so faintly show,
 With ever widening rift 440
 Of ruinous light,
 Glares to the gazing world, malignly bright.

Then, as your pinchbeck brass
 The ring of gold assays,
 The rub of doom, with many a fateful pass,
 The black that specks his soul bewrays.
 Then is he judged; and God is none
 Will hear his prayer; yea, heaven lays
 On all his friends the evil done,
 When in his heyday chase, a madcap boy, 450
 He hunts the gaudy bird that shall his realm destroy.

Such was Childe Paris when he came,
 Upon a day with Sorrow rife,
 To the Atreidae's house and smutched their fame;
 Yea, for fair welcome left foul shame,
 And stole away the wedded wife.

She left her land in evil hour 403 -
 On shore and ship grim war's deep hum,
 And desolation was the dower
 She took with her to Ilium, 460
 When she went lightly through the gate
 And broke the bond inviolate.
 And voices in the palace cried:
 'Woe's thee, high house! My princes, woe!
 Thou deep-sunk bed, whose down doth show

Where love-locked limbs lay side by side!
 And there were twain that nothing spake,
 But sat aloof, in mute heart-break,
 Of all their honour disarrayed,
 Mourning too deeply to upbraid 470
 A phantom court, a phantom king,
 The loveless ghost of Love-longing:
 She beckons him yet, she bids him come
 Over the sea to Ilium.
 The fair, the large-limbed marbles to her lord
 Are loveliness abhorred;
 This penury, sans eyes love's soul made bright,
 The end of all delight.

And then the dream-bliss comes, the lure 420 -
 That bids us to her with a lie: 480
 Ah, when we think our heaven secure
 We are the fools of phantasy.
 The fleeting vision will not stay;
 Even in his arms it steals away
 Featly, on brisk, obedient wings
 That wait upon the paths of Sleep.
 These sorrows in the courts of kings
 And worse, like shadows cower and leap
 Where the household altar burns.
 But there's a general sorrow; yea, 490
 In every home all Hellas mourns
 The mustering of the war-array;
 Her time of heaviness is come
 For them that sailed to Ilium.
 And there is much in the tragic years
 To melt her heart and move her tears.
 Him whom they loved and bade go forth men know—
 A living soul; but, oh,
 There cometh back to home and Hellas shore
 His dust, the arms he bore. 500

Ares on foughten field sets up his scales; 437 -
 Bodies of slain men, stark and cold,
 These are this merchant-moneyer's bales,
 The which in faggot-fires at Ilium turned
 To finer dust than is the sifted gold

And worth more tears, he sends
 Back to the dead men's friends;
 For them that fell too light a freight,
 For them that mourn a grievous weight,
 All in a clay-cold jar so civilly inurned. 510

And they mourn them, and praise them; and sadly one saith:
 'Ah, what a soldier was this!
 And he died nobly, dealing death';
 And ever a mutter of surly breath—
 'For a woman that was not his.'

And so, with public sorrow blent,
 Is heard the voice of discontent,
 That loved ones perish and sad hearts pine
 To right the wrongs of Atreus' line.

And some there be of shapely limbs and tall 520
 That come no more, but lie beneath the wall,
 There they possess the land for which they fought,
 Coffined in Ilium's earth that loved them not!

A people's voice on the deep note of wrong 456 —
 Grates harshly, it becomes a curse;
 Nor shall Destruction tarry long,
 It falls, as with loud thunder leaps the levin.
 Something remains behind of dark, adverse
 And night-involved, and I
 Listen forebodingly; 530
 And in this black, unquiet mood
 I call to mind, men deep in blood
 Shall not live out their days, hid from the sight of Heaven.
 Yea, for a season man's thoughts wax bold,
 And he draweth lawless breath;
 But anon the dark Furies from Hell's hold
 Chafe and change his tinsel gold
 To the huelessness of death.

And there's no help where dead men lie;
 Great glory hath such jeopardy; 540
 Zeus' eye-glance scathes, his lightning scars
 The soaring peaks that touch the stars.

Give me the ease of an unenvied lot;
To be hailed 'Conqueror' delights me not;
But let me ne'er so far from Fortune's favour fall
As live life's abject and my master's thrall.

1. Rumour runs fast through every street, 475
 As fire the tidings bloweth;
 If true—or a divine deceit—
 Where is the man that knoweth? 550
2. Oh, who so fond, in wit so lame, 479
 That kindling through him flashes
 News, that one gust can fan to flame,
 Another turns to ashes?
3. All 's fair that takes a woman's eye; 483-
 A breath—a spark—she blazes;
 But swift, and passing swift, to die
 The glory Woman praises.

CHORUS LEADER

Soon shall we know this torch-race, these relays 488 -
Of bickering brands and rallies of red fire, 560
If they be true; or like the stuff of dreams
Delight comes dazzling to delude our sense.
A herald hastens hither from the shore
All branched about with olive-boughs. The dry
And droughty dust, mire's twin-born sister, tells
He hath a voice; his message he 'll not vent
In flame, with smoke of fire from hill-top pines;
But either cry aloud our joy's increase,
Or else—but I am out of love with words
That contradict our hopes. May this fair show 570
Find fair addition; and, who wills not so,
But for his country's ruin maketh suit,
Of his misprision reap the bitter fruit.

Enter a HERALD.

HERALD

O parent earth! Sweet Argos! Past are the years, 503 -
Ten weary years—dawn breaks—and I am home.

Some hopes have parted since, but this hope holds.
 I never thought to have in this Argive earth
 A fathom of ground to be my wished-for grave.
 A blessing on thee, earth; on thee, bright sun,
 And Zeus, our High Lord, and the Pythian King 580
 No more to loose on us his arrow-blasts.
 Wast wroth enough along Scamander's bank;
 Now be our Saviour, our Physician be,
 Kingly Apollo! Greetings to the Twelve
 Great Gathering-Gods! To Hermes, my Defence,
 Herald of Heaven whom earthly heralds worship.
 Heroes, whose blessing help our setting forth,
 Receive these remnant ranks the spear hath spared!
 And you, high house of kings, halls ever dear,
 Majestic thrones, Godheads the sun salutes, 590
 If in old time returning majesty
 Your bright looks graced, beam now on a royal man
 After long years restored. Day after night
 To you, to us and all in presence here,
 Comes Agamemnon King. Oh, greet him well—
 For it becomes you well—that hewed down Troy
 With the great cross-axe of Justice-dealing Zeus;
 Broke up her soil and wasted all her seed.
 Such grievous bondage fastened on Troy's neck,
 Cometh the King, old Atreus' son first-born; 600
 A happy man! Of all men now alive
 Most worthy to be had in honour. Not
 Lord Paris, nor the guilty city, dare
 Boast they dealt us measure more bountiful
 Than we requited unto them with tears.
 Judged guilty both of rape and larceny,
 His spoil is forfeit; he hath harvested
 The total ruin of his father's house.
 So Priam's sons pay twofold for his crimes.

CHORUS

Joy to thee, herald of the Achaean host! 538 610

HERALD

My joy is at the full; now let me die; 539-
 I'll not complain to the Gods, death comes too soon.

CHORUS

I see how 'tis with thee: love of thy land
Proved a sore exerciser of thy heart.

HERALD

So sore, that now mine eyes are wet with tears
In joy's revulsion.

CHORUS

Then 'twas a sweet distemper.

HERALD

Was it so sweet? You must expound me that
Or I shall never master it.

CHORUS

'Twas love
For love, longing for longing.

HERALD

You would say
That all your heart went with the army, all
Our thoughts were turned towards home.

620

CHORUS

Ay, oftentimes
I groaned aloud for dim disquietude.

HERALD

But why so ill at ease? Why such black thoughts
About the war?

CHORUS

Pardon me; I have found
Long since silence lays balm to a bruised heart.

HERALD

Why, the princes gone, were there ill-doers here
Ye stood in dread of?

CHORUS

In so much that now—
Said ye not so?—'twere joy to die.

HERALD

In truth 551-

We have done well; but take it all in all,
A man may say that, as the years went by, 630
We had our good times and our bad times. Who,
Except the Gods, lives griefless all his days?
Our sorry lodging and our seldom rest—
And we lay hard—with all our miseries,
Would furnish forth a tale—why, is there aught
Costs men a groan we knew not every day?
These were sea hardships; but 'twas worse ashore.
There we must lie down under enemy walls.
The sky dropped rain, the earth did ceaselessly 640
Distil from the low-lying fields her damps
And rotting mildews, drenching our coats of hair,
Which soon grew verminous. Or what of winter
That froze the birds, so perishingly cold
It came from Ida blanketed in snow?
Or the hot months, when on his noon-day bed
Windless and waveless, sank the swooning sea?
Why moan all this? 'Tis past; and for the dead
Is past the need ever to rise again.
Or, why tell o'er the count of those cut off, 650
Or call to mind that to survive is still
To live obnoxious to calamity?
Farewell, a long farewell, to all misfortune!
For us, the remnant of the Argive power,
Gain conquers, and no grief that good outweighs.
Therefore, in this bright sun, over broad seas
And the wide earth flying on wings of Fame,
Well may we make our boast: 'Takers of Troy,
Hard won, but won at last, the Argive power

To the Gods of Hellas nailed these trophies up
 To be the glory of their temples old.' 660
 Then shall men hear, and sing our country's laud
 And her great captains', and extol the grace
 Of Zeus that wrought these things. Sir, I have done.

CHORUS

This wins me; I deny no more; for age 583 -
 Still leaves us youth enough to learn.

Enter CLYTAEMNESTRA.

But this
 Touches the house and Clytaemnestra most,
 Though its largesse withal enriches me.

CLYTAEMNESTRA

Oh, ages since I raised my jubilant shout, 587 -
 When the first fiery messenger of night
 Told Ilium was taken, and her stones 670
 Razed, ruined, and removed. And one of you
 Did gird me then, saying, 'Dost think Troy sacked
 Because men set a match to wood?—By God,
 A woman's heart is lightly lifted up.'
 So they supposed me crazed; and still I made
 Oblation; and a general cry of joy—
 Most womanly!—rent the air; and in the shrines
 They fed sweet spices to the hungry flame.
 And now I will not hear thee more at large;
 I shall know all from the king's lips. There 's much 680
 Asks swift dispatch, that my most sacred lord
 May have noblest of welcomes. Sweet the day,
 Sweetest of all days in a woman's life,
 When for her husband she flings wide the gates
 And he comes back from service, saved by God!
 Take back this message; that he come with speed,
 For his land loves him; tell him he will find
 A true wife waiting when he comes, as true
 As her he left; the watch-dog of his house,
 Loyal to him, but savage to his foes; 690

In nothing changed; one that has broke no seal,
 Nor known delight in other's arms, nor felt
 The breath of censure more than she has dipped
 Cold steel in blood.

[Exit.

HERALD

Strange how she boasts! Is 't not 613 -
 Though charged with truth, and something overcharged,
 Scarce decent in a high-born lady's mouth?

CHORUS

Well, she has done; you heard her, and I think 615 -
 You understood her; noble rhetoric
 For wise interpreters. But, tell me, herald,
 Comes Menelaus with you? Is he safe, 700
 Our realm's dear majesty?

HERALD

What's fair and false
 Is soon enjoyed; 'tis fruit that will not keep.

CHORUS

I would give much, couldst thou speak fair and true;
 For true and fair dissevered and at strife,
 The secret is soon out.

HERALD

Why, not to glose
 And lie to thee, we have no trace at all
 Of the man or the ship whereon he sailed.

CHORUS

Alack

And did he put to sea from Ilium
 In sight of all? Or, caught in the track of storm
 That jeopardied the fleet, part company?

710

HERALD

Dextrously thou aimst; indeed you sum great grief
In little space.

CHORUS

And other mariners—
Do they report him dead or living?

HERALD

None 632 -

Knows, nor can certainly resolve our doubts,
Save Helios, the nurturer of all life
Through the vast world.

CHORUS

Tell me, how rose the storm
And how it ended, with the wrath of Heaven?

HERALD

So fair a day we must not with foul news 636 -
Distain; we owe the Gods far other service.
No; when with looks abhorred a herald brings 720
Calamitous news, of armies overthrown;
When the general heart aches with one wound, and each
Bleeds for his own, by thousands made accursed,
Scourged from their homes by Ares' double lash,
Two-handed havoc, couplings of bloody death,
Well may he sing Erinys' song, poor man,
Bowed down to earth 'neath that sore load. But when
All 's well, and he comes bringing joyful news
To a land that maketh merry, well at ease,
How mix things good and ill, speak of this storm 730
That, not without Heaven's wrath, smote the Achaeans?
Water and Fire forgot their ancient quarrel
And sware a league together; and, to prove
How well they kept it, brake the Argive power.
Upon a night there rose a naughty sea;
And presently the roaring Thracian gale
Drave ship on ship. Tossed by the horned typhoon,

With spray of salt-sea sleet and drumming rain
 In that wild piping they were lost to view.
 And, when the bright sun rose, the Aegean wave 740
 Was lilled o'er with drowned men and wreck of ships.
 But our taut hull a Power privily
 Conveyed away, or interceded for us.
 A God it was, no man, that took the helm.
 Fortune, our Saviour, stationed her aboard
 Of grace, so that at anchor in the swell
 We shipped no seas nor swung upon the rocks.
 And from the watery abyss of Death
 Preserved, incredulous of our good hap,
 In the white dawn, sad food for thought we found, 750
 So sudden was the blow, our men so spent,
 Our fleet so shattered. And, if any of them
 Is alive to-day, certes, they give us up
 For lost, as we think them.

Hope for the best.

And yet of Menelaus your first thought
 Must be that he is sore distressed. Howbeit,
 If any ray of the sun bring note of him,
 His leaf unwithered and his eye unclosed,
 There is a hope, that by some artifice
 Of Zeus, not minded yet to destroy his house, 760
 He may come home again. Now you have heard
 My story, and may warrant all is true.

[Exit.

CHORAL HYMN

Tell me who it was could frame 681
 So unerringly her name?
 Was't not one we cannot see,
 Prophet of Futurity?
 Did not Fate his tongue inspire,
 Calling on her naming day
 Her, world's strife, and world's desire,
 Bride of Battle, 'Helena'? 770
 Helen! Ah, Hell was in her kiss
 For ships and men and polities,
 When, from behind her amorous veil,
 She sallied forth with proud, full sail,

And Love's dallying wind blew fair,
 That Iris to earth-born Zephyr bare.
 Then followed after, in full cry,
 As hounds and huntsmen take the field,
 Of gallants a fair company,
 That pressed their suit with lance and shield. 780
 Over the blue, undimpled wave,
 That told not of her oar-blade's track,
 Hard upon Simoeis' strand they drave,
 All overhung with leafy wood;
 And she whose hands are red with blood,
 Eris, was master of the pack.

Wrath, that can nor will remit 699 -
 Nothing of its purpose, knit
 Bonds that Ilium shall find
 More than kin and less than kind. 790
 And, for an example, lest
 Men in ages yet unborn
 Break the bread and foully scorn
 Sanctities 'twixt host and guest,
 Zeus, who guardeth hearth and bed,
 Hath in anger visited
 Them that led the merry din,
 Over-bold to welcome in
 With revel high and Hymen's strain,
 Sung of all the marriage-kin 800
 Bride and groom and bridal train.
 But the tide of Fate had turned
 'Gainst Priam's city, ere she learned
 A new song of sadder measure,
 Marrying her complaining breath
 To the dirge of dismal death,
 Where is neither love nor pleasure.
 Then was Paris 'evil-wed,'
 When long years she mourned her dead,
 And their blood was on his head. 810

Once on a time there lived a man, a herd; 717 -
 And he took home, finding it motherless,
 To be his foster-child, all fanged and furred,
 A lion-cub, a little lioness.

Still wishful of the warm and milky dug,
It was a gentle beast while tender yet;
Made friends with children, they would kiss and hug
The baby limbs, and 'twas the old folks' pet.

Many a time and oft the wean, bright-eyed,
Like to a child-in-arms they carrièd; 820
And, when for meat the lion-belly cried,
'Twould cringe and fawn and coax them to be fed.

Then it grew up; and from what race was sprung 727-
Proved, when as recompense for care and keep
(Ravage let loose the folded flocks among)
It made a supper of the silly sheep.

Then was the homestead soaked in blood; and they
That dwelt there, mastered by this unmatched ill,
Knew they had bred a Mischief born to slay,
A priest of Havoc sent them by God's will. 830

When first she came to Ilium Town 737-
The windless water's witchery
Was hers; a jewel in the Crown
Of Wealth that sparkles soft was she;
An eye to wound with melting fire,
The rose of ravishing desire.

But wearing now an altered grace
Love's sweet solemnities she soured,
In Priam's house a hated face,
A curse with settled sorrow dowered; 840
On Zeus the Guest-God's word swift-borne
Erinyes that makes brides to mourn.

I know how well the saying wears,
Stricken in years, but still held wise,
That boundless Wealth is blest with heirs
And Grandeur not unchilded dies;
Boon Fortune's bud and branch is she,
The hungry-hearted Misery.

False doctrine; though I stand alone,
I hold that from one wicked deed
A countless family is sown,
And, as the parent, so the seed.
But Justice hands fair Fortune on
And godly sire hath goodly son.

Yea, that old beldame, Pride, 763
Who to her lustful side
Draws evil men, anon, or else anon,
When Fate with hand of power
Beckons the destined hour
Brings forth young Pride, her Mother's minion; 860
Daughter of Darkness, sabled-hued
As the Tartarean pit, for vengeance armed and thewed.

A Power no stroke can fell,
Nor stubborn warfare quell,
A hag, a goblin, an unholy form,
The Soul of hardihood,
Swift to shed guiltless blood,
Dark Angel of Destruction's whirling storm,
She dances on the roofs of kings, 869
And by her shape men know from what foul loins she springs.

Oh, in the smoky air 772 -
Of poor men's homes, how fair,
How like a star the lamp of Justice shines!
Justice, that most approves
The faithful life, that moves
In the fixed path her Providence assigns;
And, constant to that strict control,
Forceful as Fate, pursues the orbit of his soul.

But, where in Splendour's halls,
Gold glitters on the walls, 880
And on men's hands is filth and foul offence,
With looks averse and cold
She quits the gates of gold,
And hails the hut of humble Innocence.

Wealth's coin of spurious die,
 Usurping Sovereignty,
 No image bears whereto she bends;
 She guides and governs all, and all begun she ends.

*Enter AGEMEMNON, with CASSANDRA and his train,
 seated in chariots.*

Hail to thee, monarch! Conqueror of Troy! 782-
 Offspring of Atreus! How shall I content 890
 Thy spirit in thy triumph and thy joy?
 Rise to the height of honour's argument,

And yet a chastened gratulation give?
 There are of rogues enough, ay, and to spare,
 Who in the shows of things are pleased to live,
 And thrive on falsehood as their native air.

There's little faith in man; scarce one that breathes
 But with misfortune will heave up a sigh;
 And yet the cruel sting sorrow unsheathes,
 'Fore God, his tender parts it comes not nigh. 900

And other some, be sure of this, O king,
 Can simulate a joy they do not feel;
 Come with forced smiles and fulsome welcoming;
 And crafty faces cruel thoughts conceal.

But him whose business is with droves and herds
 The gipsy's arts can captivate no whit;
 Not easy duped with warrantable words
 And protestations fair in water writ.

Sir, in all honesty, when thou didst arm 799-
 In Helen's cause, to save her launch thy ships, 910
 My portrait of thee lacked the Muses' charm,
 And 'Wisdom's helm,' I said, 'a madman grips.

'She doth consent thrice o'er, the wanton! Why
 For her make sacrifice of heroes' blood?'
 Now from the bottom of my heart I cry, 805
 'Grief, thou wast welcome, since the end is good.'

Howbeit, Time hath something yet to say
 (Though now he clap a finger to his lip),
 Touching this land, when you were far away;
 Who well, who ill, discharged his stewardship. 920

AGAMEMNON

To Argos and her Gods let me speak first, 810 -
 Joint authors with me of our safe return
 And of that justice I did execute
 On Priam's city. Not by the tongues of men,
 But by their deaths have the Gods judged our cause,
 Nor haltingly, 'twixt two opinions, cast,
 For Ilium's overthrow, their suffrages
 Into the urn of blood: the other Hope
 Drew nigh, but not a pebble dropped. And now
 Her smoke discovereth her: death's whirlblasts live; 930
 Her ashes dying with her gasp, her wealth
 In unctuous vanishings away.
 Long should our memory be and large our thanks
 To Heaven, for humbled pride and rape revenged;
 A kingdom for a wench ground up sand-small;
 Whenas the broody horse hatched out her young,
 Our basilisk, our Argive bucklermen,
 Vaulting to earth, what time the Pleiads sank;
 And Argos' Lion, ravening for meat,
 Leapt tower and wall, and lapped a bellyful 940
 Of tyrant blood.

So have I opened me 830 -
 Unto the Gods.—And yet I call your words
 To mind; your counsel squares with my own thoughts.
 How rare it is in nature, when a man
 Can spare his friend, if he stands well with Fortune,
 Ungrudging honour! Nay, himself grown sick
 In his estate, jealousy lays to his heart
 A poison that can make his burden double;
 He hath his own griefs, yet must heave more sighs
 To see a neighbour happy! Ah, I know 950
 That which I speak; I am too well acquaint
 With friendship's glass, the reflex of a shadow;
 I mean my professed friends. There was not one

Except Odysseus, the most loath to sail,
 That like a horse of mettle pulled his weight,
 And whether he be dead or alive, God knows.
 Enough of this. We purpose presently 844 -
 To call a Council touching the state of the realm
 And the service of the Gods. What's sound, we shall
 Take measures to perpetuate, but where 960
 There's need of physic, we shall in all kindness
 Use cautery or the knife, till we have rid
 The land of mischief.

Now let me pass within;
 And in my high house, mine own hearth, stretch out
 My right hand to the Gods, that sent me forth
 And brought me safely home. So victory
 That followed in my train attend me still.

[CLYTAEMNESTRA comes to meet him.]

CLYTAEMNESTRA

Good citizens, our Argive seigniory, 855 -
 I think no shame to speak of the dear love
 I bear my lord. Our blushes wear not well;
 They pale with time, and I need little schooling 970
 To tell you life to me was weariness
 Those years when he beleaguered Ilium.
 Merely to sit at home without her lord
 Is for a woman to know fearful sorrow.
 Scarce hath one crack-voiced kill-joy cried his news
 Than comes his fellow, clamouring far worse.
 An if this mould of manhood, where he stands,
 Had gotten wounds as many as Rumour digged
 Channels to be the conduits of his blood 980
 And help it home, he were as full of holes
 As, with your leave, a net. Had he but died
 As often as men's tongues reported him,
 Another triple-bodied Geryon,
 Three cloaks of earth's clay—not to pry too deep
 And talk of under-strewments—three fair cloaks
 Of clay for coverlid—thrice over dead
 And buried handsomely as many times—

Conceive his boast—three corpses, a grave apiece!
 Well, but these crabbed rumours made me mad; 990
 And many times the noose was round my neck,
 Had not my people, much against my will,
 Untied the knot. And this will tell you why,
 When looked for most, Orestes is not here,
 Lord of our plighted loves to him impawned.
 You must not think it strange. Your sworn ally,
 Strophius the Phocian, hath charged him with
 The nurture of the child, foreshadowing
 A double jeopardy; yours before Ilium,
 And here, lest many-throated Anarchy 1000
 Should patch a plot; since 'tis a vice in nature
 To trample down the fallen underfoot.
 This was his argument, and I believe
 Honestly urged. For me the fount of weeping 887-
 Hath long run dry, and there's no drop left. Oh!
 These eyes, late watchers by the lamp that burned
 For thee, but thou kept'st not thy tryst, are sore
 With all the tears they shed, thinking of thee.
 How often from my sleep did the thin hum
 And thresh of buzzing gnat rouse me! I dreamed 1010
 More sorrows for thy sake than Time, that played
 The wanton with me, reckoned minutes while
 I slept. All this have I gone through; and now, 895-
 Care-free I hail our mastiff of the fold,
 Our ship's great mainstay, pillar pedestalled
 To bear a soaring roof up, only son,
 Landfall to sailors out of hope of land!
 These are the great additions of his worth!
 And, I pray God 'tis no offence to Heaven
 To make them heard. We have had many sorrows, 1020
 And would provoke no more.

Dear Heart, come down; 906-

Step from thy car, but not on the bare ground;
 Thy foot that desolated Ilium,
 Thou royal man, must never stoop so low!
 Spread your rich stuffs before him, girls; make haste!
 That he may walk the purple-paved way
 Where Justice leads him to his undreamed home.
 My sleepless care shall manage all the rest
 As Justice and the Heavenly Will approve.

AGAMEMNON

Offspring of Leda, keeper of my house, 914 1030
 You match your much speech to my absence, both
 Are something long; the rather that fine words
 Come best from others' lips. Woman me not,
 Nor like an eastern slave grovel before me
 With your wide-mouthed, extravagant exclaim.
 Away with all these strewnments! Pave for me
 No highway of offence! What can we more
 When we would deify the deathless Gods!
 But Man to walk these sacramental splendours,
 It likes me not, and I do fear it. No, 1040
 Honour me as the mortal thing I am,
 Not as a God! A foot-cloth, that will pass;
 But think how ill will sound on the tongues of men
 These veilings of the precincts! God's best gift
 Is to live free from wicked thoughts; call no man
 Happy, till his contented clay is cold.
 Now I have told thee how I mean to act,
 And keep my conscience easy.

CLYTAEMNESTRA

Tell me this, 931
 And speak thy mind to me.

AGAMEMNON

My mind's made up; 932
 I'll not rase out mine own decree.

CLYTAEMNESTRA

Would'st thou, 933. 1050
 Faced with some fearful jeopardy, have made
 A vow to Heaven to do what now I ask thee?

AGAMEMNON

If some wise doctor had prescribed the rite, 934
 I would have vowed to do it.

CLYTAEMNESTRA

What dost thou think
Priam had done, if Priam had achieved
The victory that 's thine?

AGAMEMNON

Oh, he had trod
Your sacrilegious purples.

CLYTAEMNESTRA

Then fear not thou
Man's censure.

AGAMEMNON

In the general voice resides
A power not to be contemned.

CLYTAEMNESTRA

Good lack!
Unenvied never yet was fortunate! 1060

AGAMEMNON

This is a war of words, a woman's war; 940-
And yet a woman should not take delight
In battle.

CLYTAEMNESTRA

'Tis a virtue that becomes 941
Glory, in his triumphant hour to yield.

AGAMEMNON

While we stand here at odds, wilt thou pretend 942
Thou carest for a victory so won?

CLYTAEMNESTRA

Nay, but thou shalt indulge me; thy consent 943
Leaves thee my master still.

AGAMEMNON

Have thine own way, 944 -
 Since nothing else contents thee. One of you
 Undo these latches. Hark ye; loose me quick 1070
 These leathern underlings: and when I set
 My foot on yon sea-purples, let no eye
 Throw me a dart of jealousy from far!
 I am heartily ashamed to waste my stuff,
 Walking on wealth and woof good money buys.
 But I'll waste no more words. Lead in the lady; 950
 Be tender with her, for the Gods above
 Look gently down when earthly power is kind.
 None loves the bondman's yoke; and she's the flower
 Of all our spoils, the army's gift, a part 1080
 Of my great train. Now, I'll contend no longer; 956 -
 Let me pass on under my palace-roof,
 Treading your purples.

[He descends from his chariot.]

CLYTAEMNESTRA

There's the wide sea, and who 958 -
 Shall drain it dry? Purple! There's more of it
 In Mediterranean waves; for ever fresh,
 Worth silver ounces, the right juice to wring
 Your royal robes withal. And, God be thanked,
 We've plenty of them within; we do not know
 What 'tis to lack. I would have vowed to tread
 Raiment in heaps, if oracles had bid me, 1090
 When I was at my wits' end to contrive
 How to win back the half of mine own heart!
 Now springs the root to life; the climbing leaf,
 Tile-high, against Dog Sirius spreads a shade!
 And, in thy home-coming, our weather-wise
 Winter reads signs of warm days fully come.
 Yet, in God's wine-press, when the unripe grape
 Is trampled out into the blood-red wine,
 Then for the perfect man about the house
 There comes a wintry coolness to his cheek. 1100
 Zeus, Zeus, Perfecter, perfect now my prayer,
 And of Thine own high will be Perfecter!

[AGAMEMNON and CLYTAEMNESTRA enter the Palace.]

CHORAL HYMN

Spirit of Fear, and all Unrest, ~~178~~ 975 -
 Will thy wings never tire?
 Song that waitest no man's hest,
 Nor askest any hire,

Why this prophetic burden keep?
 What Ghost no power can lay,
 Not like the cloudy shapes of Sleep,
 Heaved with a breath away,

1110

Haunts me with evermore despair—
 Sad phantom still unflown;
 And Courage high no more speaks fair,
 Lord of my bosom's throne?

The laggard years have told their sum,
 The cables are outworn,
 Since, to beleaguer Ilium,
 Went up the host, sea-borne.

And now I see that host's return, 982
 By witness of these eyes;
 Yet in my hand is no cithern;
 My soul accompanies

1120

The song that Angry Spirits sing,
 The dirge of Vengeance dread:
 My confidence hath taken wing,
 And my dear hope is dead.

But still 'gainst hope my prayer I press,
 The event may yet belie
 My fears, and bring to nothingness
 My soul's dark prophecy.

1130

Goodman Health for his great train .1001 -
 Findeth his bounds too small,
 For the lazar-house of Neighbour Pain
 Leaneth against his wall.

Though calm the winds and smooth the wake
And Fortune's ship sail free,
There are Rocks she shall strike where no seas break,
There are shoals of Misery.

Sailor, be yare! Be wise!
Out of her deep hold heave
Of her rich merchandise
With rope and block and sheave. 1140

So you shall save your craft,
Your ship shall founder not,
Though she be of great draught
And perilously fraught.

For the bounty of Zeus shall repair
The ravage of yesterday,
And a season's tilth with the furrowing share
Chase Famine and Want away. 1150

But the blood of life once shed 1019-
Shall come to no man's call.
He that could raise the dead
And the flocking Shadows all,

Did not Zeus stop his breath
And bring him to his pause,
Lest who would heal the wound of death
Strike at Eternal Laws?

Oh, we are straitened sore;
If by strict rule dispensed,
Jealous of less or more,
Heaven's liberties be fenced, 1160

What wish dare mortal frame?
Else had my hot heart flung
All out, and put to shame
This inexpressive tongue.

Now I've no hope to unwind
 The clew of Heart's desire;
 To think is pain when thought is blind,
 The smoke of a soul on fire.

1170

Enter CLYTAEMNESTRA.

CLYTAEMNESTRA

How now, Cassandra? I must have thee too; 1035—
 Get in, since Zeus—oh, surely not in wrath!
 Hath made thee one of us, asperged with all
 Our lustral sprinklings, at our household altar
 Stood in thy place with other bondwomen.
 Step from thy wagon then and be not proud.
 Alcmena's son, thou know'st, was sold for a price
 And did endure to eat slave's barley-bread.
 He that must call Wealth lord may bless his stars
 When 'tis of honourable antiquity. 1180
 Who look for nothing and reap affluence
 Are cruel masters, stand upon no law;
 But here thou shalt be used as use prescribes.

CHORUS

She waits thine answer; being caught and caged 1047
 Yield, if thou mean'st to yield; but, it may be,
 Thou'lt not.

CLYTAEMNESTRA

Speaks she some barbarous babblement, 1050—
 Some chittering swallow-talk, that she's so slow
 To take my meaning?

CHORUS

Lady, 'twere best submit; 1053
 She offers all that thy extremity 1190
 Gives room to hope for: leave thy wagon-throne,
 And follow her, poor princess.

CLYTAEMNESTRA

While she sticks 1055-

Fast at my door, I waste my precious time;
 The dumb beasts stand about the central hearth
 Waiting the knife, and there's to be great slaughter,
 Meet for a boon vouchsafed beyond our hope.
 Make no more halt, an thou wilt bear a part.
 Come, mistress, if you cannot murder Greek,
 Make your hand talk and do your jargonning.

CHORUS

One should interpret for her, she looks wild; 1062 1200
 A hunted deer new-taken in the toils.

CLYTAEMNESTRA

Mad, sirrah, mad, and listening to her own 1064
 Contrarious heart; a captive newly caught,
 Champing the bit, until her puny strength
 She foam away in blood. Enough of this:
 I'll waste no more words to be so disdained.

[Exit.]

CHORUS

My heart's too full of pity to be wroth. 1069-
 Sad lady, leave thy car; there is no way
 But this, come down and take thy yoke upon thee.

CASSANDRA

Woe! Woe! Woe!
 Apollo! Apollo!

1210

CHORUS

Why dost thou mourn for Loxias? Is he
 Natured like us to ask a threnody?

CASSANDRA

Woe! Woe! Woe! 1076
 Apollo! Apollo!

CHORUS

Again! she doth affront the God; not so
Must we draw nigh him, wailing, wailing woe.

CASSANDRA

Apollo! Apollo! God of the great 1080 -
Wide ways of the world, my path is made strait!
Not twice shall I shun thee, my Foe and my Fate! 1220

CHORUS

Ha! Her own grief's her theme; the God-given Mind 1083 -
Bondage can break not, no, nor fetters bind!

CASSANDRA

Apollo! Apollo! God of the Ways, 1085 -
What road is this, thou darkener of my days?
What house that bends on me so stern a gaze?

CHORUS

Oh, this is the Atreidae's royal home;
Ay, truly to their high house thou art come.

CASSANDRA

Horrible dungeon! House of Sin! 1090 -
These stones have secrets, drenched in blood of kin!
Out, human shambles, stifling halls, 1230
The red rain trickling down your walls!

CHORUS

A huntress-hound! Yea, and by all that's ill, 1093
I fear this find will follow to a kill!

CASSANDRA

I know it, by this wailing cry, 1095
These shrieks of slaughtered infancy
Ta'en from their dam and roast with fire,
Set in a dish, served up for their sire!

CHORUS

We know thou art a soothsayer; natheless,
It skills not now; we seek no prophetess.

CASSANDRA

God, what 's conspiring here? What new 1100 . 1240
And nameless horror cometh into view,
To overtop and pale with bolder hue
Ghosts of old crime that walk this bloody stage,
Making Love weep and wring her anguished hands?
There is no physic can this ache assuage,
And from this woe far off all succour stands.

CHORUS

Oh, they are published sorrows, griefs that have been;
But I know not what these dark sayings mean.

CASSANDRA

Miscreant, what make you there? Why dost thou brim 1107 -
Yon cauldron for thy lord? On breast and limb 1250
The cool stream glitters. Ah, mine eyes grow dim;
The dreadful consummation, the swift close,
Makes my lips dumb, and stops my breath;
With such a ceaseless hail of savage blows
A white arm flashes, doubling death on death.

CHORUS

This thick-occulted darkness grows more dense;
Riddles and runes, confounding sound and sense!

CASSANDRA

Oh, horrible! 1114 -
What 's this? A net as bottomless as hell?
A net—a snare—ha! And what else is she 1260
That wound him in her arms in love's embrace
And now conspires to murder him! Dogs of the chase,
Devils, still hungry for the blood of Atreus' race,
Over the hideous rite shout, shout with jubilee!

CHORUS

What 's this Avenger thou bidd'st shriek 1119 -
 Within the house? Night sinks
 Upon my soul to hear thee; faint and weak,
 Drop by drop, the slow blood shrinks
 Back to my heart, to sickly pallor blenched;
 So pales some fallen warrior, his life's ray 1270
 Low down the sky in sallow sunset quenched;
 Then with swift stride comes Death with the dying day.

CASSANDRA

[*With a piercing shriek*—Ah-h-h-h! look! look! Keep 1125 -
 The Bull from the Cow! Hell-dark and deep
 As death her horn: she strikes; and he is caught,
 Caught in his long robe—falling—falling—dead
 In the warm bath with murder brimming red!
 Oh, what a tale is here! A damnèd plot
 With bloody treason bubbling in the pot!

CHORUS

I have small skill in oracles, 1130 - 1280
 But something evil I divine;
 And troth, who ever heard that he who mells
 With them learnt aught of good at grot or shrine?
 No; all the answers prophet ever framed,
 All his high-sounding syllables, when the seer
 Speaks with the Voice of God, are evil, aimed
 To exercise us in a holy fear.

CASSANDRA

O death! O doom! Mine own 1136 -
 In the cursed cauldron thrown!
 Wherefore hast brought me here! Ah, well I know 1290
 I am to follow whither he must go.

CHORUS

Thou art crazed, on gusts of God-sent madness borne! 1140
 Thyself the theme of thy sad ecstasy!
 There is nor law nor measure in thy strain;
 Like the brown nightingale that still doth mourn,

As if song sought but could not find relief;
 'Itys—Itys'—a never-ending cry,
 Her life of sorrow telling o'er again
 In her undying bower of fadeless grief.

CASSANDRA

Ah, happy nightingale! 1146 - 1300
 Sweet singer; little, frail
 Form God gave wings to—sweet to live—sans tears!
 For me the edge of doom! How fast it nears!

CHORUS

Whence come these Heaven-sent transports, whence come they? 1150
 The meaning of thine anguish none of us knows.
 Wherefore dost body forth in melody
 These terrors that thou can'st not put away?
 These notes, they pierce, they are exceeding shrill,
 And bodingly thy passionate utterance flows;
 Who made so strait thy path of prophecy 1310
 And taught thy tongue to utter only ill?

CASSANDRA

Wooring of Paris, thou hast won us woe! 1156
 Wedding of Paris, thou hast made us weep!
 Native Scamander, where thy waters flow,
 I waxed to womanhood;
 Now by Acherontian gorges deep,
 Or where Cocytus pours his wailing flood,
 My boding heart foretells
 I presently shall chant my oracles.

CHORUS

Oh, what is this dark meaning leaps to light? 1162 . 1320
 A child could understand thee, thy keen pangs
 Stab through and through me, like the venomous bite
 Of serpent's tooth, when he fleshes his fangs;
 And I am broken by the wailing cry,
 So passing piteous is thine agony.

CASSANDRA

Oh lost, lost labour! Low the city lies, 1167
 A wreck, a ruin; razed are tower and wall;
 Vainly my father lavished sacrifice

With holocausts of kine,
 Poor, pastoral beasts, that nothing stayed her fall! 1330
 Oh, heart of flame, Oh, fiery heart of mine,
 Go, burn among the dead!
 I come—I come—for me the net is spread.

CHORUS

Still harping on that chord of coming fate! 1173 -
 An Evil Spirit, bidding thee despair,
 Sweeps through thy soul with insupportable weight,
 And calls from thee this wild and wailful air,
 Sorrow and Death making one melody;
 And, oh, I know not what the end shall be!

CASSANDRA

Now shall mine oracle no more look forth 1178.
 Out of a dim veil like new-wedded bride,
 But put on brightness as a wind that blows
 Towards the sun's uprising, 'gainst the light
 Hurl, like a hissing wave, a horror far
 Hugger than this. I'll riddle you no more.
 Ye shall take up the chase and bear me out
 Whilst I hark back upon the scent of crime.
 Oh, there are music-makers in this house
 That quit it never; a symphonious Quire,
 Yet ill to hear; for evil is their theme. 1350
 Being in drink, the more to make them bold,
 They will not budge, these Revellers of the race
 Of Furies; they sit late, their drunken rouse
 The original sin; ay, that incestuous beast,
 Mounted on lust, that trampled his brother's bed.
 Went that shaft wide, or have I struck the deer?
 Or am I but a lying prophetess
 That raps at street doors, gabbling as she goes?
 Now give me the assurance of your oaths
 I know the iniquity of this ancient house. 1360

CHORUS

What 's in an oath, though in all honour sworn, 1198 —
 To help or heal? But I do marvel much
 That, bred beyond the seas, thou can'st discourse
 Of foreign horrors, alien to thy blood,
 As if thou hadst stood by.

CASSANDRA

Prophet Apollo
 Ordained me to this office.

CHORUS

Is't not true 1204 *
 He loved thee, though a God?

CASSANDRA

There was a time 1203- *
 When I had blushed to own it.

CHORUS

We are nice
 When Fortune's kind, 'tis nothing singular.

CASSANDRA

He was a stormy wooer and wrought hard 1206 1370
 To win me.

CHORUS

Was 't e'en so? And came ye then,
 As is the way of love, to getting children?

CASSANDRA

I did consent with Loxias and broke
 My promise.

CHORUS

Had'st thou then the divine gift
 Of prophecy?

CASSANDRA

Even then I told my people
All that they had to suffer.

CHORUS

How could'st 'scape
The wrath of Loxias?

CASSANDRA

This was my doom;
That none to whom I spake believed on me.

CHORUS

But we have heard thee speak, and we believe
Thy words are truth.

CASSANDRA

Ah-h—God! Again 1214- 1380
The pang—the rocking blast—the reeling brain,
And the clear vision through the pain!
Look there! They sit—they have come home to roost
These babes, the sorry semblance of sick dreams!
Dead children, dead—butchered by their own kin!
Their hands are full of meat; their mess; their own
Bowels and inward parts; out on the sight!
The lamentable dish—their father supped!
For this, I tell you, one hath planned revenge;
The craven lion tumbling in his bed 1390
To keep it warm, woe's me, till he should come
Who is my master—oh, a slave am I!
The Sea-king, Ravisher of Ilium,
Knows not her false and slaving tongue, thrust out,
Lewd bitch, to lick and fawn and smile and be
The secret soul of unforgiving hell!
Dare it, She-devil! Unsex thyself, and be
His murderess! O monster, bloody monster,
Thou hast no name! Thou aspic, Amphisboena,
Scylla of the Rocks, that is the seaman's grave! 1400
Hell's Mother-Bacchant, vowing truceless war

Against thine own! Deep in all guilt how loud
She shouted (as when the tide of battle turns),
Seeming to joy for her lord's home-coming!
Believe me or believe not, 'tis all one,
What is to be will come; a little while 1240 -
And you shall see it. Then you 'll pity me,
And say that I was a true prophetess.

CHORUS

The babes' flesh served for the Thyestean feast 1242 -
I know, and shudder at the dreadful tale 1410
In undisguised and naked horror told.
But as for all the rest my thoughts run wild
Clean from the course.

CASSANDRA

I tell thee thou shalt see
The death of Agamemnon.

CHORUS

Peace! Oh, peace!
Fair words, unhappy lady!

CASSANDRA

There 's no art
Can mend my speech.

CHORUS

Not, if the thing must be;
But God forbid.

CASSANDRA

Thou makest prayer to God, 1250 -
But they make ready to kill.

CHORUS

Name me the man!

CASSANDRA

Thou dost not understand me.

CHORUS

Troth, I know
No way at all to compass the king's death.

1420

CASSANDRA

And yet I speak good Greek, your tongue I know
Too well.

CHORUS

So doth the Pythian oracle,
Yet are his divinations wondrous dark.

CASSANDRA

Oh, misery!

1256 -

I burn! I burn! I am on fire with thee,
Apollo! Wolf-Slayer! Woe is me!
The lioness that wantoned with the wolf,
The kingly lion being from her side,
Shall take away my life; for she hath sworn
To add my wages to the hell-broth she
Brews; while she whets a dagger for her lord
Means in my blood to pay my coming here.
Why do I wear this motley? Why these wands?
These wreaths about my neck for prophecy?
Your death for mine, vile gauds! To Hell with you,
And I will follow after! Go, make rich
Another with damnation! Look, 'tis Apollo
Strips off my godly robes! I am to him
A spectacle, grinned on by friends and foes.
They called me stroller, beggar, mountebank,
Poor drab, poor half-dead starveling; evil names
And ill to bear! But that was not enough;
The prophet who made me a prophetess
Has brought me here to die a violent death!

1269 -

1430

1440

1274

And, for my father's altar, waits for me
 The block warm-reeking with the blood of him
 That 's butchered first! But we 'll not die for nought;
 We too shall have our champion, the child
 For mother's murder born and sire's revenge.
 A fugitive, a wandering outlaw, he, 1450
 To crown this fatal pyramid of woe,
 Shall surely come! The Gods have sworn an oath
 His father's curse shall bring him back again!
 Why do I shrink? Why do I wail? Since I
 Have seen what hath befallen Ilium,
 And Ilium's captors come to this bad end,
 By the judgment of the Gods, I will go in
 And meet my death. Ye Gates of Hell, I greet ye!
 Pray God that I may get a mortal stroke,
 Without a struggle, dying easily; 1460
 A spurt of blood, and then these eyes fast-closed.

CHORUS

Lady of many sorrows, and in much 1295-
 Most wise, thou hast discoursed at length; but if
 Thou hast indeed foreknowledge of thy death,
 How canst thou walk as boldly to the grave
 As goes to the altar the God-driven ox?

CASSANDRA

Sirs, I must die; delay can stead me not.

CHORUS

Yet death deferred is best.

CASSANDRA

My hour is come:
 To fly would nothing profit me.

CHORUS

Thou hast
 A patient and a valiant spirit.

CASSANDRA

You praise

1470

Not as men praise the happy.

CHORUS

Yet to die

Nobly is to have honour among men.

CASSANDRA

Oh, father, father, I am woe for thee 1305—
 And all thy noble children.

[She moves to the door of the palace, but recoils.]

CHORUS

Ha!

Why dost thou start? What terror waves thee back?

CASSANDRA

Foh! Foh!

CHORUS

What 's this offends thy nostrils? Or is't the mind 1308—
 That 's sick with fear?

CASSANDRA

Pah! The house smells of blood.

1480

CHORUS

Nay, nay, it is the smell of sacrifice.

CASSANDRA

It reeks like an open grave.

CHORUS

No Syrian nard,

God wot!

CASSANDRA

Hush! I'll go in; and there too I'll 1313 -

Wail for my death and Agamemnon's; what

I had of life must be sufficient for me.

O Sirs! Alack!

I am no bird that shrills a wild alarm

Scared at a bush. Bear witness what I am

Hereafter, when, for this my death shall die

1490

Another of my sex, another man,

For one most woefully ill-mated, fall.

And this I ask you on the edge of death.

CHORUS

Oh! for thy doom foretold I am struck to the heart!

CASSANDRA

But one word more, or, rather, my last word, 1322 -

The dirge of mine own death. I pray the sun,

Now in this last of light, that my avengers

Pay home upon mine enemies the death

I die—a slave dispatched with one swift blow!

[She enters the palace.]

CHORUS

Oh, state of man! Thy happiness is but 1331 1500

The pencilling of a shadow—Misery

With a wet sponge wipes out the picture! Ah,

And this is the more pitiable by far.

Oh, maw and ravin of Prosperity!

Hunger, that lives of men can never appease!

There's none stands guard o'er gorgeous palaces,

Bidding thee enter not, neither draw nigh!

Here is a man, the Gods in bliss alway

Gave Priam's Town for spoil, and he hath come,

With divine honours, back to his own home.

1510

But if, for blood he shed not, he must pay,

If, for old crimes, he presently must die,
 That of death's glory not a beam be shorn,
 Who that hath ears to hear can boast him born
 Under a star of scatheless destiny?

AGAMEMNON

[*Within the palace.*] Oh, I am wounded with a mortal wound! 1343

CHORUS

Hush! Who is he that crieth out? Who shrieks
 Wounded unto the death?

AGAMEMNON

Again! O God!

CHORUS

Now by the crying of the king I know 1346- 1520
 The deed is done; but what shall we do?

1. Oh,
 Summon the citizens!
2. Break in! Break in! 1350
 And put to proof this corrigible sin
 At the sword's point!
3. There thou and I are one,
 What is to do, let it be quickly done.
4. It leaps to light; now is their signal flown; 1354
 This flourish sets oppression on its throne.
5. Yes, for, while we are trifling with the time,
 Procrastination the armed heel of Crime
 Treads under; neither doth their sword-hand sleep! 1530
6. My wit is out: who dares the dangerous leap
 Let him advise.
7. Ay truly; that 's well said; 1360
 I have no art with words to raise the dead.

8. Are we, for the sake of a few sorry years,
To crook the knee before these murderers?
Are they that shame the house to lead us?
9. No! 1364
Better lie down in death than stoop so low!
Death is not half so curst as tyranny.
10. Here's too much haste; because we heard a cry 1366
Are we to argue that the king is slain? 1540
11. You're in the right on't! Give not wrath the rein
Until thou hast assurance of the deed.
Hazard surmise and certitude are twain.
12. Why, then, as most would have it let's proceed:
And, first, ere fears to acted folly run,
We'll know what hath befallen Atreus' son.

*The scene opens and discloses CLYTAEMNESTRA standing
over the bodies of AGAMEMNON and CASSANDRA.*

CLYTAEMNESTRA

If I spoke much in terms of policy, 1372
Why should I scruple to recant them now?
If Love be a close traitor, shall not Hate
Dissemble too, environing her prey 1550
In toils too high for Desperation's leap?
This is the finish of an ancient quarrel,
Long brooded, and late come, but come at last.
I stand upon mine act—yea, where I struck.
And, I confess it, I did use such craft,
He could nor fly nor fend him against death.
I caught him in a net as men catch fish;
No room, no rat-hole in his loopless robe.
I struck him twice; and once and twice he groaned;
He doubled up his limbs; and, where he dropped, 1560
I struck him the third time; and with that stroke
Committed him to Zeus, that keeps the dead!
Then he lay still and gasped away his life,
And belching forth a stinging blast of blood
Spattered me with a shower of gory dew;

And I was blithe as with the balm of Heaven
 The young corn in the birth-time of the ear.
 Wherefore, my very worshipful, good masters,
 Be merry, an it like you—I exult!
 Would you a decent draught to drench his corpse, 1570
 'Tis ready for him, and we 'll stint no drop.
 The bowl he filled with sorrow in his house,
 Now he's come home, he shall suck out to the dregs.

CHORUS

Inhuman monster! Oh thou wicked tongue 1399-
 Wilt thou insult over thy murdered lord!

CLYTAEMNESTRA

I am no fool; you cannot touch me there; 1041
 This shakes me not; I do but tell you that
 You know already. Whether you praise or blame
 Matters no jot. Look! This is Agamemnon; 1579
 My sometime husband. Here 's the hand that hewed him;
 Was 't not well done? Is 't not a masterpiece
 Of Justice? Ay, admire it how you will,
 This is the fashion of it.

CHORUS

Woman, hast eaten some evil root, 1407-
 Or brewed thee drink of the bubbling sea,
 That thou hast nerved thee for this rite?
 A thousand voices shall hiss and hoot,
 A thousand curses thy soul shall blight,
 For the deed thou hast done this day!
 Thou hast cut off, cast down, and thou shalt be
 Thyself a castaway,
 A thing exorcised, excommunicate,
 A monster, loaded with thy people's hate.

CLYTAEMNESTRA

Now, in the name of Justice thou hurl'st down 1412 1590
 Damnation and abhorrence on my head;
 But when need was, durst cast no stone at him,
 Who, with no more concern than for a beast
 Taken and slaughtered from a thousand flocks,

Slew his own child, the darling of my womb,
 For witchery against the Thracian blow. 1600
 Ought'st not thou rather for his wicked deed
 To have thrust him forth? You hear what I have done,
 And scowl, the truculent justicer! I'll tell you
 This; I am ready for your threats; 'tis odds
 But we'll cry quits; or, if you better me,
 Do you bear rule; but, if that's not God's way,
 Late Learner though thou art, I'll teach thee wisdom.

CHORUS

Thou boastest much and art great to devise; 1426
 But when I see thee in thy fury, yea,
 When thy heart is a plashing fount of blood, 1610
 I think what a foil to thy blazing eyes
 Will be that crimson flush at flood
 Sealing thy sockets in their own gore,
 In the day of God, in that great day,
 When thy scarlet sins run o'er;
 How comely then these gules will show,
 When thy lovers forsake thee, and blow quits blow!

CLYTAEMNESTRA

Now hear the unswerving tenor of mine oath: 1431-
 By Justice, that did fully venge my child,
 By Ate and Erinys, whose he is, 1620
 Theirs by this sword, my onward-treading hope
 Shall never stumble through the courts of Fear,
 So long as there is fire on my hearth
 Aegisthus lights; so long as he's my friend,
 My ample buckler, my strong heart's true shield.
 He's dead that had his lust of her; the dear
 Of every Chryseid under Ilium;
 And so's this baggage of his, his fortune teller,
 He hugged abed with him, sooth prophetess,
 And trustiest strumpet, she that with him rubbed 1630
 The rowers' bench smooth. They have their wage; thou seest
 How 'tis with *him*; and she, that like the swan
 Has dirged her last, lies with him, where he lies;
 And this poor chewet, nibbled in my bed,
 Sets on my board rich diet's sanspareil.

CHORUS

Come, some quick death, but rack me not with pain, 1448 -
 Nor keep me long abed;
 Let me thy opiate drain
 That brings the eternal sleep! My lord is dead,
 And I care not for other company; 1640
 My keeper graced with kingliest courtesy,
 Who for a woman warred on a far strand
 And now lies fallen by a woman's hand.
 Oh, Helen, Helen, conscienceless and cursed!
 How many souls of men under Troy's wall
 Didst thou cut off from life and light!
 Now thou hast done thy worst,
 And in this blood, no water can wash white,
 With the most perfect, memorablest of all,
 The last rose in thy garland twined, 1650
 Thou corner-stone of strife; thou woe of human kind!

CLYTAEMNESTRA

Call not on Death, cast down by what ye see, 1462 -
 Neither on Helen turn your wrath aside,
 As if none else were deep in blood but she;
 Nor think, because for her our Danaans died,
 There is no other hurt past surgery.

CHORUS

Spirit that on these battlements, plumb-down, 1468 -
 Dost drop on iron wings,
 To pluck away the two-fold crown
 And double sceptre of the Tantalid kings, 1660
 Thou didst raise up two Queens, and give the twain
 Twin Souls, to deal my heart a deadly wound;
 Now, like a carrion-bird perched on the slain,
 Thou sing'st thy song, to an ill descant crooned.

CLYTAEMNESTRA

Now is thy judgment just, when thou dost cry 1475 -
 To that cursed Spirit, that thrice-fatted Doom,
 A Lust Incarnate, Death that cannot die,
 That makes all Tantalids murderers in the womb,
 Athirst for fresh blood ere the old be dry.

CHORUS

'Tis a Destroying Angel, angered sore 1481
 Against this house; a Spirit, great and strong
 And evil and insatiable, woe 's me!
 That stands at Zeus' right hand, to Whom belong
 Power and Dominion, now and evermore.
 What do we, or what suffer, of good or ill,
 But, doing, suffering, we enact His Will?
 Ay, without God, none of these things could be.
 King, my king, how shall I weep for thee?
 What shall my fond heart say?
 Thou liest in spider's web-work; gaspingly 1680
 In hideous death the fleet life ebbs away.
 Woe, woe, that thou should'st bow thy head
 On this unkingly bed,
 By dagger-hand dispatched and treason's felony!

CLYTAEMNESTRA

Nay, sink thy proud boast; 1497-
 Call not this my deed;
 Never suppose me Agamemnon's Spouse;
 A spectre in my likeness drew the knife;
 The old, the unforgiving Ghost,
 Not I that was this piece of carrion's wife. 1690
 And his assassination feed
 Black Atreus of the Bloody Rouse,
 The Revel Grim.
 She hath the altar dressed
 With brawn of manhood for the tender limb
 Of weanling infants taken from the breast.

CHORUS

Go to: that thou art innocent of this blood 1505-
 What witness will avouch? Though, it may be,
 That Old Destroyer wove with thee the mesh.
 This bloody deluge, like an on-coming sea 1700
 That may not halt until it makes the flood,
 Rolls its rough waves, with kindred-murder red,
 Till Justice lave the rank corruption bred
 Of that foul, cannibal roast of childish flesh.

King, my king, how shall I weep for thee? 1513

What shall my fond heart say?

Thou liest in spider's web-work; gaspingly

In hideous death, the fleet life ebbs away!

Woe, woe, that thou should'st bow thy head

On this unkingly bed!

1710

By dagger-hand dispatched and treason's felony!

CLYTAEMNESTRA

Is he guile-free?

1521

Hath he not slain

His own, even my branch, raised up from him,

Iphigeneia, wept with all my tears?

Ah, to the traitor, treachery!

He hath discharged in blood his long arrears;

The measure he dealt is meted him again.

Then, let his big voice, in the dim

Darkness of Hell,

1720

Sink low and sadly breathed;

He hath his just quietus; this great quell

Ripostes his stroke, who first the sword unsheathed.

CHORUS

Now like a weary wrestler

1530

My fainting heart contends;

Now that the house is falling,

Where shall I find me friends?

But, oh, I fear, to overwhelm it

Red Ruin roars amain;

For the first shower is over,

1730

The early, morning rain.

Yea, Fate that forgeth Sorrow

Now a new grindstone sets;

There, for fresh hurt, her dagger

The Armourer, Justice, whets.

Oh, Earth, Earth, Earth! Would God I had lain dead, 1537

Deep in thy mould,

Ere on his silver-sided pallet-bed

I saw my lord lie cold!

Oh, who will bury him, dirge him to his rest? 1740
 Wilt thou sing his death-song,
 Murderess of thine own man; wail and beat breast
 For thy most grievous wrong?
 Mock his great spirit with such comfort cold?
 Oh, for a voice to sound
 The hero's praise, with passionate weeping knolled
 Over his low grave-mound!

CLYTAEMNESTRA

Let that alone; it matters not to thee: 155/
 For by our hand he fell, he dropped down dead,
 And we will dig him deep in earth. Let be; 1750
 We 'll have no wailers here; but, in their stead,
 His child, Iphigeneia, with soft beck,
 Where the rapid waves of the Ford of Sorrows hiss,
 Shall come; and fling her arms about his neck,
 And greet her loving father with a kiss.

CHORUS

So taunt meets taunt; but Judgment 1560 -
 Is bitter hard to gain.
 Now spoiled is the despoiler,
 Now is the slayer slain.

For Zeus abides upon His Throne, 1760
 And, through all time, all tides,
 The Law that quits the Doer,
 The changeless Law abides.

Who will cast out the accursed stuff,
 Bone of thee, breath of thy breath?
 Thy very stones, thou bloody house,
 Are bonded in with Death!

CLYTAEMNESTRA

Now is thine oracle come to the fountain-head 1567-
 Of bitter Truth. As God lives, I would swear
 Great oaths to that cursed Spirit, Whose ghostly tread 1770
 Haunteth the House of Pleisthenes, to bear

What 's past endurance, and take heart of grace
To pluck these rooted sorrows from my mind,
Would he avaunt, and harry some other race
With the Soul of Murder that seeks out his kind.
Then, with that Horror from this house cast forth
Which mads their blood with mutual butchery,
Oh, what were all its golden treasure worth?
A poor man's portion were enough for me.

Enter AEGISTHUS, with his guards.

AEGISTHUS

Oh, day of grace, meridian of Justice!	1577	1780
Now may I say the Gods are our Avengers		
And from on high behold the crimes of earth;		
For now I have my wish; I see yon man,		
Wound up in raiment of Erinys' woof;		
The shroud that shrives his father's handiwork.		
Atreus, his sire, who here bore rule, because	1583	
His power was challenged, did his father's son		
Thyestes, my dear father—dost thou mark me?—		
Outlaw and ban from home and kingdom both.		
Himself, poor man, a suitor for his life,		1790
Recalled from exile, found fair terms enough;		
No death for him, no staining with his blood		
This parent soil. But, for his entertainment,		
Atreus, this man's cursed father, with more heat		
Than heart towards mine, with a pretended stir		
Of welcome—oh, a high-day of hot joints!		
Dished up for him a mess of his own babes.		
The hands and feet he chopped and put aside;		
The rest, minced small and indistinguishable,		
Served at a special table. So he ate		1800
Knowing not what he ate; but, purge thine eyes,		
And own 'twas sauced with sorrow for his seed.		
And, when he saw what wickedness was done,		
He groaned; fell back, and spewed the gobbets up,		
Clamouring damnation down on Pelops' line.		
Yea, kicking over board and banquet, cried,		
'So perish all the house of Pleisthenes!'		
And with that push great Agamemnon fell.		

My grudge in this employed some stichery;
 I was my poor sire's third son and sole hope; 1810
 And he thrust me out with him, in cradle-clothes;
 But I grew up and Justice called me home.
 Outside these walls I grappled with yon man,
 Yea, had a privy part in the whole plot.
 And for all this I am content to die
 Now that in Vengeance' toils I see him snared.

CHORUS

Aegisthus, I hold him a caitiff who 1612 -
 Insults o'er sorrow. You do stand confessed
 A murderer; you say you sole conspired
 This sorry deed. I say to thee, thou too 1820
 Shalt not escape damnation; they shall cast
 Stones at thee; ay, heap curses on thy grave!

AEGISTHUS

You drudge, you Jack that paddles in the bilge, 1617 -
 Say you e'en so, your betters on the bench
 Of guidance and command? Your study is
 Humility, old man, and you will find
 'Tis hard for dullard age to mind his book:
 But even for eld prison and hunger-pinch
 Are rare physicians. Hast no eyes for that?
 Kick not against the pricks lest thou go lame. 1830

CHORUS

Yon woman that brings infamy on men 1625
 Fresh from the field; ay, bolted safe indoors
 Cuckolds a king and plots to strike him down.

AEGISTHUS

This shall be father to a world of woe! 1628
 Oh, Orpheus had a voice, but not like thine:
 For, where he carolled, jocund Nature danced!
 Plague on thy howlings! Thou shalt dance to them
 Whither thou would'st not, and, by God, once caught
 We'll put some tameness in thee.

CHORUS

You, 'my lord,'

You to be king in Argos! Plotting murder,
But not the man to do it!

1840

AEGISTHUS

Was not the wife 1636

The readiest way to gull him? Was not I
Smoked and suspect, his ancient enemy?
It shall go ill with me, but this man's gold
Shall make me master. He that fights the rein
Shall feel the bit, and I will make it heavy!
No corn-fed colt for me! Hunger that keeps
House with the hateful dark shall humble him.

CHORUS

Why was thy craven soul not man enough 1643
To slay him in fair fight? Why did a woman,
Wherewith the land reeks and her Gods are sick,
Kill him? Orestes yet beholds the light,
And he shall come in happy hour, and be
The master and destroyer of you both.

1850

AEGISTHUS

Wilt rave, wilt rant, wilt fall to deeds? Why, then, 1649 -
Blockhead, thou shalt learn wisdom! Forward, men!
Come, stir, good fellows! Faith, you need not trudge
Far for this fray.

CHORUS

Out swords!

AEGISTHUS

As God's my judge,
My sword is yours, I fear not death, not I.

CHORUS

Not? Then we take the omen, thou shalt die!

1860

CLYTAEMNESTRA

Sweetheart! I charge thee, do no villainy! 1654 -
 Nay, do no more! What 's sown is yet to reap;
 It is a harvest where the corn stands deep,
 And we must carry home full loads of care.
 Without our blood, here 's trouble and to spare!
 Good gentlemen, I pray you, to your homes!
 Bend to the hour, when fraught with Fate it comes,
 Lest worse befall ye. That which we have done
 'Twas fated we should do. Therefore, begone!
 Ah, might this prove the end-all of our woe; 1870
 How happy should we be to have it so!
 So heavy on us is the bloody spur
 Of a dread Spirit, Destiny's minister.
 Here is a woman's counsel, will ye heed?

AEGISTHUS

And shall these crop all rankness tongue can breed; 1662
 Drive their own fortune to the hazard; brook
 No rein; call no man master?

CHORUS

When I crook
 The knee to evil you may call me hound;
 I am no son of this free Argive ground.

AEGISTHUS

I 'll be revenged upon ye yet.

CHORUS

Not so 1880
 If Fate bring back Orestes.

AEGISTHUS

Tush! I know
 The exile's wallet is with hope well-lined.

CHORUS

Enjoy thy fortune do! Is not Fate kind? 1669
Go on in sin; wax fat; make the strong power
Of Justice reek to heaven; this is thine hour.

AEGISTHUS

Wild words, but they are reckoned to thy score. 1670

CHORUS

Ay, strut and crow, a cock his dame before!

CLYTAEMNESTRA

Nay, never heed their howlings! Masterdom 1672.
And kingly state are ours, come what may come.
So in the palace thou and I will dwell 1890
And order all things excellently well.

[*Exeunt.*

CHOEPHOROE

CHARACTERS

ORESTES, *son of Agamemnon*

PYLADES, *friend of Orestes*

ELECTRA, *sister of Orestes*

CLYTAEMNESTRA, *mother of Orestes*

AEGISTHUS

NURSE OF ORESTES

SERVANTS

CHORUS OF CAPTIVE WOMEN

SCENE: *Argos : the Tomb of Agamemnon*

CHOEPHOROË

Enter ORESTES and PYLADES.

ORESTES

O Chthonian Hermes, Steward of thy Sire,
Receive my prayer, save me, and fight for my cause;
For I am journeyed back from banishment,
And on this mounded sepulchre I call
On my dead sire to listen and give ear.

This lock to Inachus for nurture; this
For mourning.

Father, I was not by to wail thy death
Or with stretched hand dispatch thine exsequies.

What's this? Look you; what company of women
With such ostent of sable stoles attired
Moves on its way? What trouble's in the wind?
Hath some fresh sorrow fallen on the house?
Or bring they these libations for my father,
As my heart tells me, to appease the Shades?
It cannot be aught else; there is my sister,
Electra, walking with them, and she wears
A woeful look. O Zeus, give me to venge
My father's murder, fight upon my side.
Pylades, let's withdraw; I would fain know
What may this woman's supplication mean.

[*They withdraw, and the CHORUS enters in procession, with ELECTRA, and form a rectangle about the altar.*]

CHORUS

Forth from the house they bid me speed
 With graveyard-cups to pour and these ill-tuned
 Ungentle hands quick-throbbing drum-beat sent:

These cheeks in tender witness bleed,
 A fresh-turned fallow with a gleaming wound;
 And my heart's bread is evermore lament.

30

I tore my robe of fair tissue
 And the poor rags, methought, with anguish cried,
 Being too linen-soft and delicate

To be so wronged; or as they knew
 They wrapped a breast where laughter long had died,
 Or wailed a new malignancy of Fate.

For terror wild with lifted hair
 Wrung from the soul of sleep, dark dream-adept,
 In the dead hour of night a cry aghast:

A shriek it was, a shrill nightmare
 That broke from the bower, and where we women slept
 In heaviness and sullen anger passed.

40

And they whose judgment can expound
 The meaning of such dreams let a great cry,
 The word of power that doth God's word engage:

'Underneath the earth's dark ground
 Are grieving spirits wroth exceedingly;
 And 'tis against their murderers they rage.'

And now with gifts wherein is no remede

I come these woes to ward;
 For, oh, Earth-Mother, thus in her sore need
 Woos pardon and peace a woman God-abhorred.
 How dare I breathe that word? Where shall be found
 Ransom for blood that's drenched the ground?

50

O hearth Calamity enwraps;
 O royal siege swift Ruin saps;
 What sunless glooms of Night inhearsed,
 By human horror held accursed,
 Darkeneth thee, thou house of pride,
 For the deaths thy masters died?

60

The sovran awe uncombated, unquelled,
 That through the general ear
 Smote on the common heart, hath now rebelled;
 And yet, God wot, there are who fear.
 Our infirm flesh boon Fortune deifies;
 The man, grown God, high God outvies.
 But Judgment swings through her swift arc
 And censuring all doth poise and weigh:
 And she can set a soul in light,
 Or on the confine of the dark 70
 The lingering agony delay;
 Or overwhelm with elemental night.

Blood, and more blood; 'tis drunk of the dark ground;
 This earth, that bred it, kneads it in her clay,
 Till it become, indissolubly bound,
 A Power, that shall itself arise and slay!

Até with no hot haste to Vengeance spurs,
 Though tireless in pursuit, once entered in;
 Still she adjourns; the Day of Doom defers,
 Till there be full sufficiency of Sin. 80

Who hath unlatched the door of chastity,
 Enforcing there the bridal bliss embowered,
 Shall never turn again the golden key;
 And ravished once is evermore deflowered.

So, though all streams be affluent to one end,
 Lucid and sweet to wash away the stain
 Of blood from guilty hands, they do but spend
 Their onward-flowing clarity in vain.

But I—the hard constraint of heaven
 Environing my city; driven 90
 From home, my portion slavery—
 If good or evil they debate,
 Must smother up my bitter hate
 And be the mute of sovereignty.
 And yet behind my veil I weep
 My rightful master's wasted days,
 And this hush sorrow on me lays
 The ache of winter's frozen sleep.

ELECTRA

Bondmaids, the household's rule and regimen,
 Since in this office ye are postulants 100
 With me, I pray you counsel me herein.
 What shall I say when these kind cups I pour?
 How find fair words to vow them to my sire?
 'Love's gift to love'—Shall I commend them so?
 'Husband from wedded wife?' Oh, not from her,
 Not from my mother; I should want for that
 A tongue of brass; I have no form of prayer
 To pour these offerings on my father's grave.
 Or shall I come with customary terms
 And ask a blessing on their heads that sent 110
 These garlands; for fair deeds fair recompense?
 Or, in dishonouring silence, as my father
 Perished, drain out the drench for Earth to drink,
 And get me hence; like one that casts out filth
 Fling the crock from me with averted looks?
 Resolve me, friends, that you may share my blame;
 We live in a community of hate;
 Hide not your heart's deep thoughts for any fear;
 The thing determined waiteth for the free
 And him that's at another's beck and nod. 120
 Know you a better way acquaint me with it.

CHORUS

Awful as altar is they father's tomb;
 And at thy bidding I will speak my mind.

ELECTRA

Speak by that awe thou ow'st his sepulchre.

CHORUS

Pour on; but ask good things for all leal souls.

ELECTRA

Which of my friends be they? how shall I name them?

CHORUS

Thyself, and, after, all that hate Aegisthus.

ELECTRA

Then shall I offer prayer for thee and me?

CHORUS

I see thy heart instructs thee how to pray.

ELECTRA

And add no name beside?

CHORUS

Remember yet
Absent Orestes in thine orisons.

130

ELECTRA

Oh, well admonished! Excellently said!

CHORUS

Mindful of them that did the deed of blood——

ELECTRA

What then? pray on and I'll pray after thee.

CHORUS

Ask that on them, carnal or ghostly, come——

ELECTRA

Doomster or doom's executant?

CHORUS

A stern
Avenger; 'twill suffice; ask nothing more.

ELECTRA

Is that a holy thing to ask the Gods?

CHORUS

Nay, how should it not be a holy thing
With evil to reward an enemy?

140

ELECTRA

Great Herald of the Heights and Deep, be thou
My helper, Chthonian Hermes; cry for me,
And bid the Spirits of the Depths give ear,
That are the Stewards of my father's house.
Cry to the Earth that brings forth life and then
Of all she nursed receives again the seed.
I will pour these libations to the Shades,
Saying: 'O Father, have compassion on me
And on Orestes; how shall we bring him home?
We are sold for a price; yea, she that gave us birth
Hath dispossessed us, taken to her bed
Aegisthus, with her guilty of thy blood.
I 'm but a slave; banished Orestes hath
No portion of thy substance; with thy labours
They go apparelled in their insolence.
I pray, not knowing how it shall befall,
Orestes may come home: hear me, my father!
And for myself I ask a purer heart
Than hath my mother and more innocent hands.
This for ourselves; but on our enemies
I pray Avenging Justice may rise up
And hew them down, even as they hewed thee.
And so, betwixt my prayers that ask good things
Stands this, that imprecates evil on their heads.
For us send benedictions, by the help
Of Heaven and Earth and Justice Triumphant.'
Now I pour out these cups, which you must wreathe
With customary crownets of your cries,
Chanting the dismal paean of the dead.

150

160

CHORUS

Fall, perishable tears, with plashing sound;
Fall for our fallen lord;
And, while the abominable cup is poured,
The rite confound;

170

The good avert,
 And, to the miscreant's hurt,
 The evil bring to pass,
 And, though death dull thy soul and deaf thine ear,
 Hearken, O King; majestic shadow, hear!
 Alas! Alas! Alas!
 Oh, for the armed deliverer;
 The wielder of a mighty spear;
 The archer that shall bend against the foe,
 Till horn meet horn, the Scythic bow,
 Or, foot to foot and face to face,
 Beat caitiffs to the earth with huge, self-hafted mace!

180

ELECTRA

Dark Earth hath drunk her potion; in his grave
 My father hath it now. But hear what's strange
 And passing strange.

CHORUS

Speak, I implore thee! Speak!
 For, oh, my fearful heart is wildly stirred!

ELECTRA

Here is a lock of hair; laid on the tomb.

190

CHORUS

Whose? What tall youth's? Or what deep-girdled girl's?

ELECTRA

Why, only look; it is not hard to guess.

CHORUS

I'm an old woman, and shall youth teach me?

ELECTRA

There's none would shed a hair for him but I.

CHORUS

Yea, foes are they should mourn with shaven head.

ELECTRA

'Tis like; a feather of the self-same wing——

CHORUS

Whose hair is 't like? I am on thorns to know.

ELECTRA

'Tis very like the hair of mine own head.

CHORUS

Not young Orestes' gift in secret brought?

ELECTRA

It is a tendril of that vine, I swear.

200

CHORUS

It is? But how dared he adventure hither?

ELECTRA

'Twas sent, this shearling of his filial love.

CHORUS

That 's no less worth my tears to think that he
Will never again set foot in his own land.

ELECTRA

To me it is the surging of a sea
Bitter as gall; an arrow through my heart.
These tears are but the thirsty thunder-drops
Escaped from unwept deluges; the flood
Is yet to come. Who else that 's native here
Could show the fellow to this goodly tress?
Nor was it clipped by her that murdered him;
'Tis not my mother's: what a name is that
For her that hates her own and denies God!
But howsoe'er by this and that I vow
This shining jewel is my best beloved
Orestes' own, I am beguiled by hope.

210

Oh me!

Would it had sense; a voice to make report
 That I be shook no longer to and fro,
 But roundly bid to curse and spew it from me, 220
 If 'tis indeed shorn from a murderer's head;
 Of that 'twould prove its kin and with me mourn,
 This grave's bright ornament, my father's pride.
 But, when we call upon the Gods, they know
 By what great storms, like mariners at sea,
 We are tossed and whirled. And, if they mean to save,
 Then from small seed a mighty stem may grow.
 Ha! Here are footprints! here is double proof!
 Look! They are like! They tally with mine own!
 Nay, there's a pair—each in outline distinct! 230
 He hath been here with some companion!
 Heel, length of tendon, all agrees with mine.
 The hope within me struggles to be born,
 And I am crazed until it come to birth.

ORESTES

(disclosing himself)

Henceforth pay fruitful vows to the good Gods
 For answered prayer.

ELECTRA

Wherefore stand I now
 So high in heaven's favour?

ORESTES

Thou hast sight
 Of that which thou didst pray so long to see.

ELECTRA

Know'st thou whom my soul craves of all the world?

ORESTES

I know thy heart is woe for Orestes. 240

ELECTRA

How have my prayers prospered?

ORESTES

Here am I;

No further seek; for I am all thou lov'st.

ELECTRA

Sir, art thou come to take me in a snare?

ORESTES

An if I do, I plot against myself.

ELECTRA

I fear you mean to mock my misery.

ORESTES

I jest at mine, if yours can make me merry.

ELECTRA

Art thou indeed Orestes?

ORESTES

You are slow

To know me when you see me face to face;
And yet this snip of hair could give you wings;
And when you looked upon it you saw me;
A footprint of your make was proof but now.
Come, put the shorn tress to the shaven head;
Look at this stuff; 'tis of your loom; your spathe
Smoothed it; you broidered this brave brede of beasts.
Refrain thy heart, lest joy unhinge thy wits:
For our dear kin are our most mortal foes.

250

CHORUS

Thou darling of thy father's house; sole hope
Of saving seed, watered with many tears!
Now show thy mettle; win back thine own home.

ELECTRA

Thou eye that centres all sweet thoughts; four selves 260
Composed in one; for there is none but thee
Left to call father, and the tender love
That was my mother's, ere she earned my hate,
Yearns all to thee; and all I felt for her
Twin-sown with me and pitilessly slain;
And ever my true brother; my one name
Of awe; may Power and Justice be with thee
And Zeus, the greatest of the trinity.

ORESTES

Zeus, Zeus, be perfect witness of these woes.
Lo, the young eagles desolate: their sire 270
Dead in the tight-drawn knot, the twisted coils
Of a fell viperess. Orphans are we
And faint, unfed; unable for the prey
Our father took and to our eyrie bare—
So stand I in thy sight; so she stands,
The sad Electra; fatherless children both;
And either's home is outcast homelessness.
The young of him, Thy sacrificial priest,
A mighty honourer of Thine, if Thou
Cut off, what hand will such rich guerdon give? 280
And if the eaglets Thou destroy, there's none
To send and show Thy tokens among men;
This royal stem if it be quite consumed
Steads not Thy altars when fat bulls are slain.
Tend it; and out of nothingness exalt
A house that seemeth razed even with the ground.

CHORUS

Oh, you salvation of your father's house,
Hush; or some rogue, sweethearts, will hear of this
And with his pick-thank tongue carry the tale
To our cursed masters, whom I pray to God 290
I may see fry in bubbling pinewood blaze!

ORESTES

Great Loxias' word shall never play me false,
That bade me hold upon my perilous way,
Entoning high, and horrors freezing cold,
To make hot livers lumps of ice, forth-telling,
If I tracked not my father's murderers
As they tracked him, nor took my full revenge
With brute, bull-fury gold cannot allay:
My life must answer for it, charged with all
Afflictions that can rob us of our joy. 300
Of death in life, earth's sop to malice old,
He with dread voice in our frail hearing told;
As, foul serpigoes cankering the flesh,
Gnawing the native wholesomeness away,
Till all be furred with the white leprosy.
Next, of the Haunting Furies, conjured up
To take full vengeance for a father's blood,
Seen in the dark, with horrible amaze
Of eyes at stretch and twitch of tortured brows;
And that black arrow winged by pining ghosts 310
Of murdered kindred, madness and wild fear
Shaped on the night to harry and hound him forth,
Raw with the excommunicating scourge.
He tastes not of the loving cup; none spills
With him the red wine in the banquet-hall;
The sightless spirits of his father's wrath
Forbid him every altar; none will house
Nor lodge with him; all sweet civilities
Denied, and no man he may call his friend,
He dies at last, death in each part of him, 320
A mummied wretch, embalmed in rottenness.
Well—should I hearken to these oracles?
If I do not, the deed is yet to do.
All impulses concur to one great end;
A God's commands, grief for my father, loss
Of all that I am heir to, shame and scorn
That that most famous breed in all the world,
High hearts that humbled Troy, my noble Argives,
Should kneel it, like knaves, to a pair of women;
For he is not a man; or if he be 330
The man he is he passing soon shall see.

CHORUS

Ye Mighty Destinies, march on,
 God with you, till the goal be won
 Where Justice' face is set.
 'To tongue of gall the bitter word,'
 Loud is the voice of Vengeance heard,
 When she exacts the debt.
 'To dagger-hand the dagger-law,'
 'The doer quit'—'tis an old saw
 Whose salt hath savour yet.

340

ORESTES

O father, father of our woe!
 How can I serve thee now by word or deed?
 From this far world what homing wind shall blow
 Where the Eternal Anchors hold thee fast?
 There thy long day is night:
 And at this gate of death where thou hast passed,
 Our grief that are of Atreus' royal seed
 Is all thou hast of glory and delight.

CHORUS

Child, the proud spirit of the dead
 Succumbs not to the ravening tooth of fire.
 Their passions work, when life is fled:
 The mourner's wail
 Discovers him that did the wrong.
 And lamentation for a murdered sire
 A hunter is, that rallies to the trail
 All dogs that e'er gave tongue.

350

ORESTES

Hearken then, father, our lament,
 While at thy mounded tomb our salt tears flow;
 An alternating song, of sad concent,
 Dirged by thy children; suppliants that crave
 Access to thee; banned, both, from thy high hall,
 Met at the common refuge of thy grave.
 What's here of good? Where 's aught that is not woe?
 And is not Doom the master of us all?

360

CHORUS

But God can touch the broken strings
To melody divine;
And for this unrejoicing round,
The burden of sepulchral ground,
In the high banquet-hall of kings
Blithe song bring in new wine.

370

ORESTES

Oh, if 'neath Ilium's wall,
Gashed by some Lycian spear,
Father, thou hadst fall'n in fight,
Then hadst thou left thy house great praise,
And to thy children in the public ways
Honour in the eyes of all.
Then thine had been a sepulchre
Builded of many hands beyond the sea,
And easy would our burden be,
And all its weight of earth how light!

380

CHORUS

And in the Kingdom of the Dark,
Welcome wert thou to souls that nobly died;
A lord of majesty and mark,
The cupbearer
Of Hell's vast Thrones; for while thou yet hadst breath
Thou wast a King; and, in that Kingdom wide,
Next them that the huge orb of Fate upbear,
Their rod and sceptre Death!

ELECTRA

No, not on Troy's far plain
Would I have thee lie, interred,
Where Scamander's waters flow,
With meaner men that fell to the spear,
But none, oh, none, that was thy peer.
Death should have first thy murderers slain;
And, haply, we had heard
Some far-off rumour of their dying,
And never ate the bread of sighing
Nor tasted of this cup of Woe.

390

CHORUS

Thy tongue, child, tells of things more worth
Than any weight of gold,
Or aught of fabled bliss that's told
Of that far bourne beyond the bright North Star.
So may'st thou range in fancy uncontrolled;
But our hard hands scourge this unfeeling earth,
And at the massy gate fast shut of old
The summons knocks where our sole helpers are.
They lift not white hands at heaven's judgment-bar.
Who triumph now, under God's malison;
Yea, and by this the children's cause is won.

400

ORESTES

Oh, 'twas fledged, that word, it clave
The dull ear that sleeps in the grave.
Zeus, O Zeus, if Thy command
Conjures from the Deeps below
Ghostly Vengeance, footing slow,
Stretching forth an arm to gripe
Sinful soul and felon hand,
Evil lendings, fully ripe,
Loan and interest shall have.

410

CHORUS

Oh, to rend the air with a shout
When in their blood they lie,
The woman and her mate!
What wing of Deity
Hovers about me and about?
I cannot hide this huge unrest;
My spirit passionate
Doth like a straining vessel breast
The bitter blast of hate!

420

ELECTRA

And when will Zeus, the strong Godhead,
Grasp the bolt with grapplings dread
To cleave their climbing crests amain?

430

May firm affiance keep our land;
I sue for nothing at God's hand
But that after oppression long
Justice walk the world again.
Hear, Earth; and all the Chthonian throng
Throned in the darkness of the dead!

CHORUS

It is the Law; when man's blood falls
Man's blood shall pay full cess:
With 'Haro! Haro!' Murder calls
God's fell Erinyes, 440
And in some late succeeding age
For souls slain long ago
Fresh horrors mount the bloody stage
For blacker deeds of woe.

ORESTES

Oho! O heigh! Ye dim Dominions!
Princedom of Death! Ye potent malisons
Of murdered men! Behold and see
Of Atreus' noble tree
The poor, the pitiful, the last
Scantling, from home and kingly state outcast! 450
Hear us, O Zeus, for we have none but Thee!

CHORUS

I listen and tremble; thy cry of dole
Fevers my heart; anon
Faint for wanhope am I;
It thickens my blood, it clouds my soul,
Thy passing piteous cry!
But when the fit is gone,
And my fixed heart is firm to dare,
Pain stands far off; and calm and fair
And cool the brightening sky. 460

ELECTRA

How move the dead? How prosper in our plea?
Oh, what can wring them like our misery!

This cloud that overhangs
 Our house, these parent-pangs?
 Traitress! She could fawn and glose,
 But she can never cheat us of our woes;
 We are her children and have wolfish fangs.

CHORUS

I beat to the sound of the Arian dirging,
 Yea, to the Kissian wailer's cry;
 With wild hands lifted high and high, 470
 Clashing and clutching and tossing and surging;
 Faster, faster, never ending;
 A tempest of blows on my head descending;
 And the noise, like a hammer, dinned through my brain;
 A passion of Sorrow, a tumult of Pain!

ELECTRA

Oh, mother, deep in all
 Damnation! Oh, remorseless enemy!
 A king borne out to unkind burial,
 No liegeman by!
 A husband thrust in his grave, and none 480
 To wail or weep or chant an orison!

ORESTES

Ha! Did she use him so spitefully?
 She shall aby full dearly her despite!
 With Heaven to help and hands to smite,
 I'll slay her in her blood and die!

CHORUS

Hacked like a thief, by her that felon-wise
 Graved him; in her cold malice, that his doom
 Might insupportably thy days consume;
 These were thy father's last death-agonies.

ELECTRA

They would have none of me; humbled and chidden, 490
 Like a pestilent hound, a cur unwhipped,
 Closeted up in the castle-crypt;

There in the kennelled darkness hidden
 Freelier flowed my secret weeping
 Than ever careless laughter leaping
When the world was gay and my heart was light.
Brother, my wrongs in thy memory write!

CHORUS

Let that thy courage brace,
Like steel-drilled marble, mortised and made one
 With thy calm heart's unshaken base. 500
 What's done is done:
But stick not till Expectancy behold
The sequel: on; be firm as thou art bold.

ORESTES

Father, be with us! Father, thee I call!

ELECTRA

And I with heavy heart and streaming eyes!

CHORUS

And all our many voices sound as one!
 Rise, oh, rise,
 And feel the sun:
Be with us 'gainst the common enemy of all!

ORESTES

Plea shall encounter Plea, Power grapple Power! 510

ELECTRA

The righteous cause, ye Gods, judge righteously!

CHORUS

I listen, and I shudder while ye pray:
 Destiny
 Abides always,
But prayer can hasten on the inevitable hour!

ORESTES

Oh, heritage of Grief! Incarnate Woe!
Oh, Bloody Hand of Doom that jars the strings!
Now is the voice of melody brought low!

ELECTRA

Oh, how they grate, these harsh chords Sorrow wrings!

ALL

Pang on pang, and throe on throe!

520

ORESTES

Within there is no stytic for this wound,
And the wide world is powerless to aid;
By our own hands our safety must be found,

ELECTRA

Fury with fury, blood in blood be stayed.

ALL

This is our hymn to the Gods Earth-bound.

CHORUS

Hear, ye Earth-dwellers all, that have
Power and bliss beyond the grave!
The seed of Childhood succour and save!

ORESTES

Father, by thy unkingly death, grant me
In thy high house lordship and mastery!

530

ELECTRA

Take away my rebuke, let not men say, 'Behold,
Aegisthus' chattel, marketed and sold!'

ORESTES

Then, as our fathers used, feasts shall be spread
For thee; else at the banquets of the Dead
Among the steaming bakemeats thou shalt pine.

ELECTRA

And of my rich dower, plenished from thy store,
To thee refreshing draughts my cup shall pour;
First of all sepulchres I will honour thine.

ORESTES

Earth, grant our sire our combat sore to see!

ELECTRA

Give, Persephassa, beauteous victory!

540

ORESTES

Think, father, of the bath thy life-blood dyed.

ELECTRA

Think of the cunning net, the deep and wide!

ORESTES

In gyves, no smith e'er hammered, caught and bound!

ELECTRA

Veilings of Shame about thee, treason-wound!

ORESTES

Doth not that sting thee, rouse thee from thy bed?

ELECTRA

Wilt not lift up thy well-belovèd head?

ORESTES

Bid Justice rise and battle for thine own;
Or let us close with them, as thou wast thrown,
If thou wouldst quell their might that dealt thee doom!

ELECTRA

Hear this last cry, my father, hear and save! 550
Lo, the young eagles gather at thy grave;
Pity the man-child and the woman's womb!

ORESTES

Let not this seed of Pelops be destroyed!
For then, in spite of Death, thou art not dead.

ELECTRA

Children are voices that shake off the lethe
Of drowsy Death; yea, floats, whereby the thread
And thin-wove line of Being is up-buoyed
Above the swallowing gulfs that yawn beneath.

ORESTES

Hear for thy sake the voice of our despair;
Thou sav'st thyself if thou receive our prayer. 560

CHORUS

Right well have ye discoursed your argument,
Fit homage to an evil fate unmourned.
And now, since thou hast nerved thee for the act,
Dare it, and put thy Fortune to the touch.

ORESTES

So shall it be; 'tis nothing from my course
To ask the meaning of these cups, and why
Her after-scruple tends a cureless sorrow.
Is Death a simpleton that she dares make
Such poor amends? What shall I think of these
Sorry bestowals for her huge offence? 570
Why, if a man should lavish all he has
For one least drop of blood, 'twere labour lost.
I prithee, if thou can'st, enlighten me.

CHORUS

Son, I was there; she was so shook with dreams
And terrors of the night, her wicked heart
So scared, she tremblingly dispatched these cups.

ORESTES

Told she her dream?

CHORUS

She did; 'Methought,' she cried,
'I was delivered of a viper!'

ORESTES

Well,
Finish thy story.

CHORUS

Then, as 'twere a child,
She hushed and wrapped it up in cradle-clothes. 580

ORESTES

And what meat craved the dragon-worm new hatched?

CHORUS

She gave it her own breast, ay, in her dream.

ORESTES

Did she so? Then I warrant her paps are sore.

CHORUS

It milked her, and sucked out the curded blood.

ORESTES

There was a meaning in this vision.

CHORUS

She cried in her sleep and started broad awake.
And all the palace-lamps, that hung blind-eyed
In darkness, blazed up for the mistress' sake.
And, presently, she sends these loving-cups;
She thinks them surgery for distempered thoughts. 590

ORESTES

O parent earth, sepulchre of my father,
Answer my prayer and make this dream come true!
In my interpretation all coheres.
For, look you, if the asp came whence I came,
If it was wound in swaddling clothes, and gaped
With mumbling mouth about the breast that nursed me,
And mingled mother-milk with curded blood,
By this, and by her shriek that saw the dream,
Then, as she gave suck to a devilish thing,
She dies in her blood; and I am dragon-fanged 600
To kill her as the dream would have me do.

CHORUS

Oh, good; your reading of it contents me well;
And Heaven fulfil it; but give us first some clew:
Which shall be actors here and who look on.

ORESTES

In sooth, a simple story: she must within,
And it shall be your charge to cloak my plot.
So, as their treason slew a royal man,
They may be tricked and the same noose they rove
Strangle themselves, even as Loxias spake,
Apollo, Prince and Prophet ne'er found false. 610
My guise a traveller, all my traps complete,
With Pylades here I 'll to the palace-gates,
As a friend of the house—trusty—oh, true as steel!
And he and I will talk Parnassian,
Mimic the parle of Phocis for the nonce.
'Tis like enough their varlets will not smile
A welcome, there's such devilment within.
No matter; we will wait; and passers-by
Will say 'How comes it Aegisthus denies
A stranger, if he be not gone abroad?' 620
But once across the threshold of the court,
And if I find him on my father's throne,
Or he come anon and look me in the face,
Hell gapes for him, down drop his dastard eyes,

Ere he can quaver 'What 's your country?' I
 Will spit him on my sword a carcase for crows.
 And then Erinys, that stints not her cups,
 Shall quaff full healths of slaughter unallayed.
 Go, sister; have an eye to all within,
 That nothing in our business go agley.

630

[*To the CHORUS.*]

And see that ye offend not with your tongue;
 Speak, or say nothing, as occasion serves.

[*To PYLADES.*]

Hither to me: second me with thine eye;
 Put mettle in my heart and point my sword.

[*Exeunt ORESTES and PYLADES*]

CHORAL HYMN

The tribes of earth are fierce and strong;
 And in the arms of ocean throng
 The monster enemies of man:
 From highest heaven's noonday throne
 Flashes and falls the thunderstone
 On four-foot beast and feathered clan;
 Yea, and remember the hurricane
 With his cloak of wrath outblown.

640

But the pride of man's spirit what tongue can tell,
 Or woman's unruly desires, that fell
 And hungry flock that feed on death?
 These lawless yearnings of the blood
 That master wanton womanhood
 Corrupt sworn troth with venal breath
 And break the bond that comforteth
 Man and beast in field and flood.
 Is that a fetch of thought beyond thy wing?
 Learn of the plot that ill-starred Thestias fired,
 And her own child's untimely death conspired,
 Casting into the flame
 The rusty brand, of his nativity
 Prime comrade and coeval, numbering
 His minutes, from that hour when with a cry
 Forth from her womb he came
 To the last day appointed him to die.

650

Or wist ye not of the girl-murderess 660
 Whose infamy yet lives in legend old?
 That for a carcanet of Cretan gold,
 King Minos' gift, by foes
 Suborned, delivered up a well-loved head?
 Stealing from Nisus the immortal tress,
 What time—Oh, heart of dog!—in his noon-bed
 Breathing he lay in deep repose;
 And Hermes drew him down among the dead.

But since old sorrows I recall
 That suck no balm from honeyed shower, 670
 Pour out to brim the cup of gall,
 The sanguine wine of wedlock sour.
 Oh, bid them from thy hall
 And bid them from thy bower,
 These dark imaginings of woman's wit
 Against her warrior
 Whose mien the foe with darkness smit,
 The majesty of war.
 Bright shines the hearth where no fierce passions throng
 And woman's valour when she shrinks from wrong. 680

So in the roll of antique time
 Her primacy black Lemnos bears;
 Her shame is cried in every clime;
 And all that horror dreads or dares
 Of that cursed Lemnian crime
 The sable likeness wears.
 She feels the ache of God's most grievous ban:
 And her despised race
 Under the general scorn of man
 Is gone to their own place. 690
 That which displeases God none holds in awe;
 What cite I here that contradicts His law?

There is a sword, whose biting thrust
 God's Law drives home; plunged to the hilt
 Clean through the naked heart; for guilt
 Lies not down-trodden in the dust
 That men may trample as of right
 On all that's holy in God's sight.

Now Justice' anvil standeth fast;
 The Armourer, Doom, beats out her blade; 700
 Within is privily conveyed
 A Child that quits the bloody past;
 That true-born Child Erinys brings;
 Dark are her deep imaginings.

Before the palace. ORESTES and PYLADES. CHORUS.

ORESTES

Boy! Boy! Do you hear me knock? What, boy, I say!
 Who's there? Open, if in Aegisthus' halls
 Be welcome for a stranger.

DOORKEEPER

Ay, have done!
 I hear ye. What's your country, and whence come you?

ORESTES

Announce me to your masters; I bring news
 Meant for their ear. And set about it quickly; 710
 For now the chariot of night comes on
 Darkling; it is the hour when travel casts
 Anchor in hostelries and roadside inns.
 Let one of charge and consequence come forth—
 Some worthy dame—or, stay, a man were best;
 For then nice manners need not overcast
 Frank speech; a man is to his brother man
 Open in converse, free without offence.

CLYTAEMNESTRA *appears at the palace door with* ELECTRA.

CLYTAEMNESTRA

Sirs, what's your will? Here is such entertainment
 As fits my house; warm baths, an easy couch 720
 For tired limbs, and looks of honest welcome.
 But if there's graver business to dispatch,
 That's men's concern and they must hear of it.

ORESTES

I come from Phocis; I am a Daulian;
And on the road with mine own merchandise
To Argos here, which is my journey's end,
A man to me unknown, as I to him,
Met me, inquired my way and told me his;
Strophius the Phocian, as appeared anon.
'Sir' quoth he, 'since you are travelling to Argos, 730
Do me the service to inform his parents
Their son Orestes is no more; forget not;
And whether they decide to have him home,
Or leave him ours for ever, bury him
In his adopted land, bring word again.
Meantime, his urn clips in its brazen round
The ashes of a man right nobly mourned.'
That was his message; whether chance-delivered
To whom it concerns, who may herein command,
I cannot tell; but they whose son he is 740
Must surely be apprised of it.

CLYTAEMNESTRA

Oh me!

How are we stormed upon, broke, breached, despoiled!
Unmastered curse of our unhappy house
How wide thy range! Things out of reach thy bolt
Brings down from far, and thou dost pluck from me
To the last hair all, all that I hold dear!
And now Orestes; he that thought to plant
His foot out of the mire of muddy death,
The hope that physicked this debauch of blood,
Pricked in thy roster answers to his name. 750

ORESTES

Would I had better news to recommend me
To my so honourable entertainers
And grace their proffered welcome. What can warm
The heart like kindness betwixt host and guest?
And yet it had been wicked to my thinking
Not to discharge an office laid on me
Both by my pledged word and your courtesy.

CLYTAEMNESTRA

Oh, not for that will we scant your deserts
 Or make you the less welcome to our house.
 Another had brought these tidings, if not thou. 760
 But it is time that day-long travellers
 Find full suppliance for the weary road.

[*To ELECTRA*]

Do you bestow him in the men's guest-chambers,
 His company and all his retinue.
 Let them be treated as becomes our house;
 And be it done as you shall answer it.

[*ELECTRA, ORESTES, and PYLADES enter the palace.*]

These news we will impart unto our lord;
 And he and I, with help of our good friends,
 Take counsel touching this calamity.

[*CLYTAEMNESTRA follows.*]

CHORUS

Content! Content! Oh, when shall we, 770
 Dear'st handmaidens, full lustily
 Orestes' triumph-song resound?
 Majestic earth! Thou cliff high-shored,
 Whose shadow sleeps on the longships' lord,
 Give ear and send us present aid!
 Now is the hour of combat knolled,
 And Parley, with the tongue of gold,
 In guile unguessed moves darkly dight,
 And Nether Hermes cloaked in Night
 Shall watch this grim and bloody round 780
 Fought to the death with naked blade.

[*The NURSE is seen passing within.*]

The mischief works! His hand is in, our guest!
 Orestes' nurse, all tear-bedabbled! Hist!
 Where steps Kilissa at the dark entry,
 Unsalariéd Sorrow all her company?

The NURSE comes to the door.

NURSE

Why, I am bidden by my lady run
 And fetch Aegisthus; she 'll have this confirmed;
 And man to man before it has time to cool
 They are to piece it out. Among her slaves
 She wears a knitted brow, but in her eyes
 Lurks laughter for this finish and fair close
 Of her much care; though 'tis of care compact
 For us, this traveller's tale that cleft my heart.
 Ah, God, when he has heard it, probed and proved,
 How will his spirit dance for joy.

790

Heigh-ho!

Sorrows begone, ill with worse ill confounding,
 The long, sick agonies of Atreus' line,
 Did, in the coming of them, wring my heart.
 But none of them were half so grievous-heavy,
 And I found patience to bear them all.
 But my dear Orestes, spendings of my soul,
 Whom I took from his mother's womb, nursed in my lap,
 And at his peevish piping broke my rest,
 And was so patient with him, trudge and drudge,
 And get no thanks. 'Tis but a witless thing,
 We have to nurse, no whelp more whimsical.
 It can't speak plain, a weanling in long clothes;
 Woo't drink? woo't eat? make water, woo't? God made
 The little belly a law unto itself.

800

I would divine his wants, and oft as not
 Go wrong; and fall to washing dirty napkins,
 Laundress and nurse too, all for my sweet babe.
 Oh, turn and turn about, I plied both trades
 When I took Orestes from his father's arms.
 Alack, and now they tell me he is dead;
 And I must get me to this dunghill dog
 Will take my tidings with a greedy ear.

810

CHORUS

How did she bid him come—in what array?

NURSE

How? Say 't again: I do not understand thee.

CHORUS

Or with his bodyguard or unattended?

820

NURSE

She bade him bring his Yeomen of the Guard.

CHORUS

Never deliver to the brute her message!
Tell him to come alone, that he may hear
From lips unawed; say, 'quickly, cheerly come!'
A tale that 's warped oft straightens in the telling!

NURSE

Dost mean that these are welcome news to thee?

CHORUS

'Tis an ill wind Zeus cannot turn to good.

NURSE

Good? And our hope, our dear Orestes dead?

CHORUS

'Twere no mean prophet could expound my text.

NURSE

What mean'st? Hast aught that squares not with the tale? 830

CHORUS

Run! Take thy message, do as thou art bid:
Safe in Heaven's Hands is all that touches Heaven.

NURSE

Well, I will suffer ye to have it so;
And by the bounty of God may all end well.

[Exit NURSE.]

CHORAL HYMN

Father of Heaven, hear me in this hour;
Raise up a fallen house; vouchsafe to bless
Hearts that thirst and eyes that ache
To see the Face of Soothfastness.
Justice is all the plea I make;
Uphold it with the Hand of Power.

840

Oh, Zeus! Him in yon house of kings
Prefer above his enemies,
And he shall bring Thee free-will offerings,
With triple lauds and threefold sacrifice.

'Tis but a Colt, bethink Thee, sired of One
Beloved, that 's linked to the Iron Car of Woe!
Collect those fiery paces! Mete
The measure of his stride, that so
With steady rhythm of galloping feet
He break not till the course be run!

850

Ye Dwellers of the inmost shrine, adorned
With vessels of fine gold,
Hearken! Ye Gods, that with us wept and mourned!
Cancel with fresh Doom the blood of old
Shed guiltily, till all 's undone!
Nevermore, come Time, come Tide,
In the House where Ye abide
Grizzled Murder get a Son!

God of the Grot, the vaulted Fane,
Give these blind walls back their sight!
Make them Man's fair home again!
Give them Freedom! Give them Light!
Through this dark Veil, of Thy Grace,
Make them show a shining face!

860

Meet is it Maia's child with subtlest craft
Our dubious venture speed:
Is none so deft, so nimble-light, to waft
To port the hazard of a dextrous deed!

He opes or shuts with 'Yea' and 'Nay'
 The gold of His hid Treasury;
 His Word is night to the seeing eye,
 And darkness in the broad noonday. 870

Then, for deliverance from Despair,
 For a steady breeze and strong,
 We 'll harp and sing to a merry air
 The mumping witch-wives' song:

'The ship rides free; come, fill my lap;
 Put money in my purse;
 Largesse, fair Sirs, for your good hap
 And the boon of a broken Curse.' 880

Thou to the deed march boldly on;
 And, when thou hear'st her cry—'My Son'
 Answer—'Not thine!'—and with one blow
 In blameless blood-guilt blot this Woe!

On! Lest a word should win thee,
 A look break down thy guard;
 Harden the heart within thee,
 As Perseus' heart was hard!

Make stern amends; relent not;
 Doth the wronged ghost forgive?
 Relax not—pause, repent not!
 They ask it that yet live! 890

Strike, strike for Hate's allaying,
 The House of Hate within,
 And with one sinless Slaying
 Slaughter the Seed of Sin!

Enter AEGISTHUS.

AEGISTHUS

I come not here unasked; a message reached me;
 I 'm told there 's a strange rumour, certain men,

Our guests, have brought, little to pleasure me;
 Orestes' death. That were with a fresh load 900
 To chafe a sore that runs with fears unstaunched,
 And open bygone Murder's aching scars.
 Shall I concede it true? Look'st forth clear-eyed?
 Of null and void as woman's vain alarms;
 A flight of sparks that presently come to nought?
 What canst thou tell me that shall clear my doubt?

CHORUS

Only that we have heard it: go within:
 Question the strangers, man to man; there lies
 The marrow and pith of all the news e'er brought.

AEGISTHUS

I'll see this messenger and question him 910
 Again, if he was present at the death;
 Or vents a tale that hath no substance in it.
 They that would steal my wits first steal my eyes.

[Exit.

CHORUS

Open my lips, order my prayers aright,
 O God above!
 Give them the strength, the breadth, the depth, the height,
 Of my exceeding love!
 Now on the soilure of one slaughterous sword
 Hangs Doom and Death
 For all the race of Agamemnon Lord; 920
 Or light and breath
 Of Liberty on its keen edge shall glance;
 And, by those brandished fires,
 He shall possess a Kingdom's governance
 And the glory of his sires.
 And, in this gest, a solitary knight,
 Two crafty foes grips he,
 Even Orestes, girt with a hero's might;
 God give him Victory!

[A shriek is heard within the palace.

Hark!—Hush!—which way
 Went the battle? What is Heaven's will,
 O House, for thee this day?
 Let 's go aside that in this dark event
 It may be thought that we are innocent:
 What 's done is done; or be it good or ill.

930

The Inner Court.

DOORKEEPER

Alas, my master! Oh, my lord, Aegisthus!—
 A bloody, bloody end! Open!—Be quick!
 Unbar the women's gates! Muscle and brawn,
 Mettle of manly youth, we need you now—
 But not—God help us—for the helpless dead!
 Ho there, within! Oho!
 'Tis shouting to the deaf; they are asleep;
 They need me not! Where 's Clytaemnestra? What
 Doth she? Fore God, her neck is for the knife;
 Yea, by the hand of Judgment she must fall!

940

Enter CLYTAEMNESTRA.

CLYTAEMNESTRA

What 's this? Why do you keep this bawling here?

DOORKEEPER

The dead have come to life and slain the quick.

CLYTAEMNESTRA

Ah, God! Ah, God! I read your riddle; we
 Are to perish even as we slaughtered him,
 Tricked and betrayed! Bring me a battle-axe!
 We 'll know if we mount high or fall full low;
 I touch the bound and bourn of all my woe.

950

*Enter ORESTES, PYLADES with him, dragging the dead body
 of AEGISTHUS*

ORESTES

I am come to fetch thee; thy fellow hath his fill.

CLYTAEMNESTRA

Oh, my dear'st love, Aegisthus—dead—dead—dead!

ORESTES

Thou lov'st him? Good! Then thou shalt lie with him
In 's grave; there thy false heart can never betray him.

CLYTAEMNESTRA

Oh, hold thy hand! My child—my babe—look here!
My breast; be tender to it; thy soft gums
Did in thy drowse so often drink its milk.

ORESTES

Pylades, what now? Shall I be tender to her? 960

PYLADES

What then were Loxias' prophesyings worth,
His holy oracles? What oaths deep-sworn?
Better the world thine enemy than Heaven!

ORESTES

Thou art my better mind; thou counsell'est well.
Come here; I mean to slay thee where he lies,
Whom thou didst count a better than my father.
Sleep with him in death since thou lov'st him, and hat'st
Him whom thou oughtest truly to have loved.

CLYTAEMNESTRA

I nursed thee; I would fain grow old with thee!

ORESTES

What? Kill my father and make thy home with me! 970

CLYTAEMNESTRA

Destiny, dear child, was partner in my guilt.

ORESTES

And Destiny accomplishes thy doom.

CLYTAEMNESTRA

Child, fear'st thou not a mother's malison?

ORESTES

Mother! You cast me out to misery!

CLYTAEMNESTRA

Not cast thee out. They were our trusty friends!

ORESTES

You basely sold me, born a free man's son.

CLYTAEMNESTRA

Where is the price that I received for thee?

ORESTES

I am ashamed to tell thee openly.

CLYTAEMNESTRA

Nay, do; but leave not out thy father's sins!

ORESTES

He wrought for thee while thou sat'st safe at home.

980

CLYTAEMNESTRA

'Tis nature, child; unmanned we ache and pine.

ORESTES

They win ye bread that ye may eat at ease.

CLYTAEMNESTRA

Is it even so? Child, wilt thou slay thy mother?

ORESTES

Thou slay'st thyself, it is not I that kill thee.

CLYTAEMNESTRA

Beware the bandogs of a mother's fury!

ORESTES

Except I do this how shall I 'scape my father's?

CLYTAEMNESTRA

I am like one that cries to the deaf grave!

ORESTES

My father's fate strikes thee with airs of death.

CLYTAEMNESTRA

Thou art the aspic I brought forth and nursed!

ORESTES

Thy fearful dream was prophet of thy woe, 990
And thy foul sin pays forfeit in thy sorrow.

[ORESTES *drags in* CLYTAEMNESTRA, *followed by*
PYLADES.]

CHORUS

Oh, my heart's heavy even for their fall.
But since the gory edifice of woe
Orestes copes and crowns; 'tis better so
Than he be quenched who was the eye of all.

CHORAL HYMN

There came on Priam's sons at last
Judgment and Retribution sore:
There came two Lions wrapped in one tawny hide
To Agamemnon's house, yea, two-fold War.
But, warned at Pytho, furious and fast, 1000
The banished man drove on amain, with God for Guide.

Shout! Shout, Ho! with a jubilant rouse!
Shout for my lord and my lord's house
Delivered from evil; from the twain that defiled
His hearth and his substance squandered!
Farewell, the lone, the trackless wild,
The waste of Woe we wandered!

Came He that loves the dark surprise
 Deep Retribution subtly planned;
 And Zeus' own Daughter in this combat dire 1010
 Her finger laid on the avenger's hand;
 Men call her Justice—on her enemies
 She vents the blast of her consuming ire.

The Voice of Loxias,
 In great Parnassus' rocky cavern heard,
 The word of guile where no guile was,
 Though long deferred,
 Hath come to pass.
 The power of God can never pass away
 Because no evil thing is help thereby; 1020
 Meet is it, then, we worship and obey
 His governance Whose Hand sustains the starry sky.

The dawn breaks fair; the night is spent;
 The bit is loosed and the bridle unbound;
 Rise, walls! Rise, tower and battlement,
 Ye shall no more lie levelled to the ground.

And it shall not be long
 Ere pardoning Time, the world's great Hierarch,
 Shall pass with sound of charming song
 These portals dark, 1030
 Absolve the wrong,
 And break the spell that bound them, utterly.
 Fortune shall throw a main and sweep the board;
 And we shall see her face and hear her cry;
 'Here will I make my home, to your fair house restored.'

*The scene discovers ORESTES and PYLADES standing over the
 dead bodies of CLYTAEMNESTRA and AEGISTHUS.*

ORESTES

Behold the tyrants that oppressed your land,
 Slayers of fathers, plunderers of kings' houses.
 But now they kept great state, seated on thrones;
 Yea, and, methinks, they yet lie lovingly
 In death, true honourers of their oath and bond. 1040

They swear that they would kill my father, swear
 To die together, and were not forsworn.
 Behold, ye judges of their heinous crimes,
 The thing they wrought, the links that bound my father,
 Gyves for his wrists and fetters for his feet.
 Shake it abroad, stand round me in a ring,
 Hang out these trappings, that a father's eye,
 Not mine, but he that watcheth all the world,
 Helios, may view my mother's handiwork;
 Ay, and hereafter testify for me 1050
 That justly I pursued even to the death
 My mother; I reckon not Aegisthus' end;
 For by the law the adulterer shall die.
 But she that hatched this horror for her lord,
 By whom she went with child, carried the load
 Of sometime love—but this tells you 'twas hate!—
 What? Had she conger's teeth or adder's fangs,
 She had corrupted where her tooth not bit,
 So absolute was she in iniquity.
 How shall I name this right and use fair words? 1060
 Trap for a beast? Clout for a dead man's feet?
 A towel is't? Fore God, a trapper's toil;
 A noose; a gown that trips the wearer up;
 Some rascal publican might get one like it,
 That robs his guests for a living; ay, with this,
 Put scores away and feel no cold fit after.
 I pray God one like her may never house
 With me—I'd liefer go childless to my grave.

CHORUS

Aiai! the woeful work! This hideous death
 Ends thee; thy pride and all thy passions cold; 1070
 For him that yet must draw this lethal breath
 The flower of suffering begins to unfold.

ORESTES

Was this her work or not? This proves it, this
 Robe, sullied with Aegisthus' dagger-plunge.
 The tinct of murder, not the touch of Time
 Alone, hath—here and here—spoiled its rich brede.
 I'll praise and mourn him now, I was not by
 To mourn and praise, with his death-robe before me.

Sad act, sad end, thrice-wretched race, triumph
No man need envy, soilure of my soul.

1080

CHORUS

Time grants not our so perishable clay
Bliss that endures or glory that shall last;
Heaviness wears the instant hour away,
Or it will come before the next be passed.

ORESTES

Mark this: for I know not where it will end,
Dragged like a driver of hot, headlong horses
Quite from the track; beaten and borne afar
By breakneck thoughts; fear at my heart, at stretch
To strike up the grim tune, whereto 'twill dance.
While I am in my senses, I protest
I slew not, friends, my mother save with cause,
My father's blood upon her, and Heaven's hate.
I lay it on the charm that made me bold;
On Pytho's prophet, Loxias, that charged
Me do the deed, and sware to hold me guiltless
If done; if not—I sink the consequence:
No bolt ere shot can hit that height of suffering.
And now behold and see how I am furnished
With branch and wreath, and, thus apparelled, go
To earth's great nombril-precincts, Loxias' ground,
And that famed fount of indestructible fire,
Kin-murder's outlaw; at no hearth but His
Did Loxias bid me look for sanctuary.
Hereafter let all Argives bear me out
Not without strong compunction did I deal
So ruefully with her that gave me life.
I am a wanderer now, I have no friends,
But, live or die, this shall be told of me.

1090

1100

CHORUS

Thou hast done well; let words of evil note
Be far from thy lips: give not ill fancies speech.
Thou hast delivered all the land of Argos;
Sawn off with one sword-sweep two dragon-heads.

1110

ORESTES

Ha! Ha!

Women, they come about me—Gorgon shapes,
Sheeted in grey—clasped round with scaly folds
Of intertwined snakes—away! away!

CHORUS

True son to thy father, what fantastic thoughts
Are these? Stand fast! thou hast triumphed; fear for nought.

ORESTES

These fearful torments are no phantasies;
These are the leashed sleuth-hounds my mother slips! 1120

CHORUS

Because the blood is fresh upon thy hands,
Therefore this sudden frenzy rocks thy soul.

ORESTES

Apollo! Prince! Look, look!—They come in crowds—
And from their eyeballs blood drips horribly!

CHORUS

Haste thee where cleansing is! To Loxias!
Hold fast to him and find deliverance!

ORESTES

Ye see them not, but I see them; they turn
Upon me! Hunt me forth! Away! Away!

[He rushes out.]

CHORUS

Fair Fortune go with him; God be his Guide;
God keep him ceaselessly, and send him peace!

1130

There rose Three Winds and shook thee, sad palace where
Power sat throned,

And now the third bloweth over, the last that the first atoned.

The First Wind came with crying of children slain long ago;

Long, long was it a-dying, the Thyestean Woe!

The next Wind swept with slaughter, but not by the foeman's
sword;

All bloody was the water that laved Achaia's lord.

Now the Third Storm hath struck thee from the vast of an
infinite gloom;

Shall I hail thee Wind of Deliverance, or art thou a blast of
doom?

Oh, when will thy course be finished, when wilt thou change
and cease,

1139

And the stormy heart of Havoc be lulled into lasting peace?

[*Exeunt.*]

EUMENIDES

CHARACTERS

ORESTES

APOLLO

ATHENA

GHOST OF CLYTAEMNESTRA

PROPHETESS of the Temple at Delphi

HERMES

THE COURT OF AREOPAGUS

} *Mute*

CHORUS OF FURIES

ESCORT OF THE FURIES

SCENE: *Delphi. Before the Temple of Apollo*

EUMENIDES

PROPHETESS

Before all Gods my punctual prayer prefers
Gaia, first Prophetess; Themis next her,
Who did succeed her Mother in this seat
Oracular, as some have told us; third
In order, by her free, unforced consent,
Sat here another Titaness, Chthon's child,
Phoebe; and she gave it a birthday-gift,
To Phoebus, who took on him Phoebe's name.
From his still mere, his craggy Delian Isle,
On Pallas' shore, the port of ships, debarked, 10
Hither he came, to this Parnassian grot;
With fair conduct and worship and great laud
From Hephaestus' sons, that hewed his path, and made
The unreclaimed and savage region tame.
Rich honours had he here from the simple folk
And from Delphos, their prince and governor.
And Zeus possessed him of his mystery,
And planted him fourth seer upon this throne;
Prophet of Zeus is Loxias, Son of Sire.
These are the gods of prefatory prayer. 20
But Pronaan Pallas hath prime mention, too;
Their lauds the Nymphs of the Corycian Rock,
Hollow birds love, repair of Deities;
The wild is Bromius' chace, never forgot,
Since His Divinity captained the Bacchanals
And toiled King Pentheus like a mountain hare.
On Pleistus' Fountain and Poseidon's Force
I call, and highest Zeus, All-Perfecter,
Ere I go in and take my prophet-throne.
And now good hap all heretofore excelling 30
Wait on my going in, and every Greek,
By lot admitted and old custom-law.
I deal mine answers as the God me guides.

[She enters the Shrine but returns almost immediately.]

Horrors past speech, horrors I durst not look on,
 Have driven me forth again from Loxias' House!
 My limbs failed me; I could not stand upright;
 On hands and knees I scrambled along the ground!
 Fear makes us old wives naught, helpless as babes.
 As I was passing toward the wreath-hung shrine
 I saw a man right at the Nombriil-Stone,
 He did pollute, sit like a suppliant; blood
 Dripped from his hands; he held a naked sword
 And a high-branched and leafy olive bough,
 With a great flock of wool all meekly tied;
 A silvery fleece; of that I am very sure.
 And over against the man a company
 Of awesome women sound asleep on thrones;
 And yet not women; rather Gorgon-shapes;
 And yet not Gorgons neither by their mien.
 I have seen pictures of She-things that snatched
 At Phineus' feasts; but these, methought, were all
 Wingless and black and made my blood run cold.
 They snored with blasts I dared not draw anigh,
 And from their eyes let ooze an evil rheum;
 Their garb no vestment for the marble Gods
 Nor fit to carry to the homes of men.
 I never saw the kindred or the tribe
 Of this strange fellowship, nor know the land
 Could breed them and not sorrow for their birth.
 Let this be looked to by great Loxias.
 Prophet and leech and portent-reader, He;
 In homes not His the Purgatorial Power.

40

50

60

[Exit.

*The Temple-doors open, disclosing all that the Prophetess has
 described. APOLLO stands over ORESTES.*

APOLLO

My word is passed: I never will forsake thee,
 Thy guardian to the end, close at thy side,
 And far away not tender to thy foes.
 These ogreish maws are muzzled now, thou seest;
 These cursèd carlines cast into a sleep;
 Old barreners, the early get of Time,
 Ne'er clasped in love by God or man or brute.
 For Evil's sake brought forth, since Evil came,

70

The Dark their pale, and Tartarus 'neath the world;
 Fiends loathed of flesh and of Olympian Gods.
 Natheless, fly thou and never faint thy heart;
 For they will drive thee over continents,
 Treading for evermore the travelled earth,
 And over the sea and cities far enisled.
 Weary not ere thy warfare come; chew not
 The cud of fearful phantasy: get thee
 To Pallas' town; there clasp her statua,
 And we will find thee Judges of thy cause, 80
 And frame sooth speeches that shall work like charms
 For evermore deliverance from thy sorrow.
 I speak, that bade thee strike thy mother down.

ORESTES

O Prince Apollo, Thou know'st to do right;
 Let not thy lore, oblivious, lapse from use.
 Thy puissance to effect is my sure bond.

APOLLO

I charge thee, think on that: fail not from fear.

[He turns to the statue of HERMES.]

And thou, My blood-brother, My Father's Son,
 Hermes, be Thou his Keeper; prove Thy Name,
 Great Guide: be Pastor of my sheep that cries 90
 To me; Zeus careth for the castaway,
 With Thy fair escort sent among mankind.

[Exit ORESTES. APOLLO retires into the Sanctuary.]

Enter the Ghost of CLYTAEMNESTRA.

GHOST OF CLYTAEMNESTRA

Sleep then: Sleep on! And whereto serve your slumbers?
 I only must endure your contumely
 In death: the rebuke of my assassination
 Clings to me yet among unbodied ghosts;
 A vagabond, an outcast! Let me tell ye
 They lay a sore indictment to my charge.
 And for these fearful wrongs, mine own dealt me,
 Not one of all the Invisible Powers is wroth, 100
 Though mine own child lifted his hand against me!

Look at these wounds! Behold them with thy heart!
 When the soul sleeps the inward eye is bright:
 No glance of Fate is glimpsed in the waking day.
 Times without number at my hand ye lapped
 Your draughts not mixed with wine, abstemious cups;
 Your solemn midnight suppers I have roast
 At mine own hearth, when no God else is served.
 And yet all this is trampled in the dust;
 And he is fled, gone like a fleet-foot fawn,
 As lightsome leapt the toils, and laughs full loud.
 Give ear! For I have pled for soul, for life,
 For being! Wake, Goddesses of the Deep!
 A dream that once was Clytaemnestra calls.

110

[*A noise of whining.*

Whimper and whine, but you have lost your man.
 He hath his friends, and they are not like mine.

[*Whining.*

Thou sleep'st too sound; thou car'st not for my wrong;
 Orestes that spilled his mother's blood flits free.

[*Growling.*

Thou snarling slug-a-bed! Wilt not get up?
 What hast thou done but evil since Time was?

120

[*Growling.*

Weariness and Sleep, the arch-conspirators,
 Have stolen the fell Dragon's strength away!

[*Two sharp howls.*

A FURY [*Still asleep*]

There, there, there, there!
 Ware, hound!

GHOST OF CLYTAEMNESTRA

Thou hunt'st the hart in dream, and like a dog
 That ne'er hath done, criest on the trail in sleep.
 What would'st be at? Up, lest sloth master thee
 And with its dull balm numb the nerve of pain.
 Ache with that inward anguish thou dost owe,
 The rankle of remorse, stern virtue's barb!
 Let loose on him thy breath, that reeks hot blood!
 Dry him up with smoke! Blast him with fire of thy belly!
 Make this fault good and follow to his fall!

130

[*She rushes out.*

CHORUS LEADER

Rouse all! Rouse her—and her! And I'll rouse thee!
 Sleep'st? Get thee up! Shake off the shackling sleep!
 Let's see if we have jeopardied our chase!

CHORUS

1. Undone! Undone!
 Oho! Oho!
 We are shamed! We are shent!
2. I have hunted my woe! 140
3. Ah, sister, and I,
 And all of our cry!
 Balked, baffled, and foiled;
 We panted and toiled,
 As hounds on the trail,
 While the thicket he kept,
 But the deer leaped the pale—
4. While I slumbered and slept!
1. A thief and a knave
 Art thou, Zeus' Son! 150
2. Our ancients
 Thy youth hath o'errun!
3. The suitor finds grace
 At thy hands this day!
 The wicked one,
 The matricide,
 That Heaven defied,
 Thou of Heaven's high race
 Hast stolen away—
4. And was this well done? 160

It is a knotless cord that cuts me most,
 A phantom smart,
 A charioteer of Dream, a chiding Ghost,
 Hath wrung my heart!
 I have been whipped; I stiffen at the stake,
 A public show;
 The hangman's knout hath stung me with dull ache,
 Blow upon blow!

'Tis the new fashion, their just heritage
 They count too small. 170
 They must engross, these godlings come of age,
 They will have all!
 And we must see the world's great Nombril-Stone
 Spout blood, aghast!
 Polluting purples desecrate a throne,
 Whose gules shall last!

Blind Seer! Himself infects His Holy Seat;
 With obscene unction mires
 His inmost Altar, whose hearth-embers heat
 Prophetic fires. 180
 Self-bidden, self-impelled,
 Against Heaven's Law He hath rebelled,
 A dying cause He honoureth
 And immemorial Rights consigns to death!

He hath become abominable to me!
 Nor shall to the end of Time
 Cast loose whom He hath bound to Him, go free,
 The Patron God of Crime!
 Where one takes soil, a thousand cursed
 Miscreants shall follow on the first, 190
 Set their unholy feet upon his head,
 Trampling His sanctuary with unquiet tread!

Enter APOLLO, with his bow and quiver of arrows.

APOLLO

Out! I command you! Fast and faster yet!
 Avoid My precincts! Quit Mine oracle!
 Or take with ye a wingèd adder sheen,
 Shot from My bow that 's strung with golden wire,
 And with the pang puke up black froth of men,
 The retchy gobbets thou hast sucked from slaughter!
 Ye do presume when ye come near My house;
 Ye should be with chopped heads and gouged-out eyes, 200
 Dooms, executions, maimed virilities,
 Boy-eunuchs, mutilations, whittled trunks,
 Stonings, deep groans and agonizing shrieks,

Spines spiked on iron pales! Now have ye heard
Your horrible regale, that makes Gods hate ye,
Your dainty dish? Ay, everything about ye
Betokens it. In some blood-bolting den
Of lions hutch and house; but rub not off
Your foul, infectious hides in my rich fane;
Go, griesly goats! Get hence, unshepherded!
No Son of Heaven would deign to pasture ye!

210

CHORUS

Now listen to our answer, King Apollo!
Thou art—I say not the abettor of this—
But the sole Doer; Thou and only Thou.

APOLLO

How, I beseech thee? So far thou may'st speak.

CHORUS

Thou bad'st the guestling feigned do matricide.

APOLLO

I bade him venge his father; what of that?

CHORUS

Red-handed Thou received'st the murderer.

APOLLO

I charged him haste for cleansing to My house.

CHORUS

And dost Thou rail at them that help him hither?

220

APOLLO

Ye are not fit to enter where I dwell.

CHORUS

It is our bounden duty and our charge.

APOLLO

What dignity is this? Cry me your worth!

CHORUS

We harry mother-murderers from men's homes.

APOLLO

What do ye to a wife that kills her husband?

CHORUS

'Tis not so black as spilling kindred blood.

APOLLO

Injurious hags, ye make of no account
High Hera's nuptial bond and Zeus' troth-plight:
Cypris the tenor of your pleading scoffs,
That gives to men the dearest joys flesh knows.
The marriage-bed a parcel is of Fate,
Hedged by a holier law than all oaths else.
If there be murder there, and thou relax,
Not punish, nor bend thither an angry brow,
I say, in law thou canst not ban Orestes.
For I perceive ye burn with zeal 'gainst him,
And show towards them a marvellous unconcern.
Not so the Goddess when she tries the cause.

230

CHORUS

Not while Time lasts will I relinquish him.

APOLLO

Pursue him then and multiply thy travail.

240

CHORUS

Breathe no abridgment of my majesty.

APOLLO

Nay, were it tendered me I'd none of it.

CHORUS

Great art thou, ranked no lower than Zeus' chair.
 Ha! I smell mother-blood! It leads me on
 To vengeance: I will hunt the miscreant down!

[The Chorus rush out.]

APOLLO

I will protect him, and draw him out of harm.
 Dreaded of men and feared in Heaven is the wrath
 Of him that sues for grace, if I forsake him.

A year or perhaps longer passes : the scene changes to Athens and the Shrine of Pallas, whose image stands in front of the stage.

Enter ORESTES, weary, with bleeding feet.

ORESTES

Athena, Queen, by Loxias' command
 I am here; be kind; receive a runagate, 250
 But not a recreant with uncleansed hands.
 My guilt grows dull, the edge of it worn down
 On hearths not mine and the highways of the world.
 Across wide continents, over the sea,
 To Loxias' oracular command
 Obedient, I am come unto Thy house,
 Yea, to Thy holy Statua, Goddess,
 Here will I harbour and abide Thy Doom.

[He crouches down and clasps the image.]

Enter the CHORUS

CHORUS

Aha, a palpable trace; we have him now!
 Follow this close informer's mute record! 260
 We are the hound and he is the hit fawn;
 The blood's the trail, and we mark every drop.
 Ha! I breathe hard, this helter-skelter heaves
 My hollow flanks; we have quartered the whole earth,

Across the ocean warped our wingless way
 Still close abeam, and never lost his sail.
 Or here, or not far off he quaketh sore.
 The smell of man's blood is laughter to my soul—

A winsome reek!

Go seek, go seek, go seek!

270

Search and sound

All this ground

Lest the vagabond we chase

Slip into safe hiding-place,

And for mother-murder done

Guilty son

Out of Law's reach scape scot-free.

There—there—there.

Yonder he sits!

See how he knits

280

His arms about Her image old

That breathes ambrosial air!

And doth Her succour make thee bold?

And do those hands implore

Her sentence? That shall never be!

Sorrow on thee!

The mother-blood those murderous hands have shed

Is irrecoverably fled!

The swallowing earth shall yield it nevermore!

Thy life for hers; thou shalt fill me a cup

290

Drawn from those veins of thine;

Deep draughts of jellied blood I will sip and sup,

Though bitter be the wine.

And then, when I have sucked thy life-blood dry,

I'll drag thee down below!

There mother's son shall mother's agony

Expiate, throe for throe!

And thou shalt see all damnèd souls, whilome

Sinners 'gainst God or guest

Or parent; and of each the righteous doom

300

Shall be by thee witnessed!

For Hades is a jealous Judge of Men,

And in His Black Assize

The record writ with ghostly pen

Cons with remorseless eyes.

ORESTES

I am made perfect in the rule of Sorrow,
By oft occasions schooled know when to speak
And when refrain. But on this theme I am bid
By a most wise Preceptor ope my lips.
The blood from off this hand fades, fallen on sleep; 310
The spot of mother-murder is washed white;
That, when 'twas fresh, on Divine Phoebus' hearth
Was purged away with blood of slaughtered swine.
'Twere long to tell from that first hour all those
I have consorted with and harmed no man.
Now with pure lips that can no more offend
I ask Athena, Sovereign of this realm,
To be my helper. Hers are we then, not won
In war, myself, my Argos and her people,
By pact well-kept her fedaries for ever. 320
If she about the parts of Libya
Round Triton's rapid river, her natal stream,
Her foot advance, or veil with flowing train,
True friend of them she loves; or Phlegra's flats,
Like a bold cateran, lord of his clan, surveys,
Thence let her come—a God can hear from far—
And from this sore distress redeem my soul.

CHORUS

Maugre Apollo and Athena's might
Thou goest to perdition, derelict
And damned; no place for joy in thy lost soul; 330
A calf bled white for fiends to munch, a shadow.
Answerest thou nothing? Art too sick with scorn,
My fatling, for my table sanctified;
My dish, not altar-slain but eaten alive?
Hear then the bitter spell that binds thee fast.

Come, dance and song, in linkéd round!
More deep than blithe Muse can
We 'll make these groaning chanthers sound
Our governance over Man!
No parley! Give us judgment swift! 340
We vex not in our wrath who spread
White hands to Heaven uplift.

Not unto such; he journeyeth
 Unharm'd, a happy traveller
 Through life to the last pause of Death:
 But to the froward soul, that seeks,
 Like *him*, to cloak up, if he could,
 Plague-spotted hands, with murder red,
 To such our apparition speaks,
 The faithful witness for the dead, 350
 Plenipotentiary of Blood
 And Slaughter's sovran minister.

CHORAL HYMN

Hear me, my Mother! Hark,
 Night, in whose womb I lay,
 Born to punish dead souls in the dark
 And the living souls in the day!
 Lo, Leto's Lion-cub
 My right denies;
 He would take my slinking beast of the field,
 Mine, mine by mother-murder sealed, 360
 My lawful sacrifice.

But this is the song for the victim slain,
 To blight his heart and blast his brain,
 Wilder and wilder and whirl him along;
 This is the song, the Furies' song,
 Not sung to harp or lyre,
 To bind men's souls in links of brass
 And over their bodies to mutter and pass
 A withering fire!

Long the thread Fate spun 370
 And gave us to have and hold
 For ever, through all Time's texture run,
 Our portion from of old.
 Who walks with murder wood,
 With him walk we
 On to the grave, the deep-dug pit;
 And, when he's dead, he shall have no whit
 Too large a liberty!

Oh! this is the song for the victim slain,
To blight his heart and blast his brain, 380
Wilder and wilder and whirl him along!
This is the song, the Furies' song,
Not sung to harp or lyre,
To bind men's souls in links of brass
And over their bodies to mutter and pass
A withering fire!

When as yet we were quick in the womb,
This for our jointure was meted;
And the Gods that know not Death's doom
Are not at our table seated; 390

With us they break no bread,
And of all their raiment shining,
I wear nor thrum nor thread;
I will have no fame for my shrining!

But when Quarrel comes in at the gate
For the crashing of homes, when Hate
Draweth his sword against kind,
Ho! who shall our fleet feet bind?
Though he putteth his trust in his strength,
The blood that is on him shall blind, 400
And our arm overtake him at length!

Grave cares of public trust claim we
With sudden, swift appearing;
Let hell's contention set heaven free,
Discharged without a hearing.

For all the Tribe that come
Dropping blood of kin, curse-ridden,
Zeus stoppeth their mouths; they are dumb,
To His high parole unbidden.

But when Quarrel comes in at the gate 410
For the crashing of homes, when Hate
Draweth his sword against kind,
Ho! who shall our fleet feet bind?

Though he putteth his trust in his strength,
The blood that is on him shall blind,
And our arm overtake him at length!

Glory of Man, to the azure day
Lifted in pomp, shall pass away,
Crumbled to ashes, a glory discrowned,
When we come, black Spirits sable-gowned, 420
 Demon dancers, dour and dun,
 That step to the tune of Malison!

A lusty leaper am I
 And the feet of me shod with steel
Dint earth with doom from on high,
 And the strong limbs quake and reel,
And the stride of the runner slackens full slow
When I trample him down to the night of woe!

He falleth and wotteth no whit of his fall,
Wildered and lost; so sick a pall 430
Like pestilence hangs o'er the soul that hath sinned;
And rumours wist, like a sobbing wind,
Loud in the land of his blindness tell
And the stately house whereon Darkness fell.

A lusty leaper am I,
 And the feet of me shod with steel
Dint earth with doom from on high,
 And the strong limbs quake and reel,
And the stride of the runner slackens full slow
When I trample him down to the night of woe! 440

Ay, Judgment may be stayed,
 But it will come!
Skilled craftsmen are we at our trade,
 Perfect in masterdom!
Yea, and therewith our memory is good
 For all the evil under the sun;
To Man implacable, much wooed,
 But hardly won!

Jealous of honours indefeasible,
 Though by the Gods held in despite and scorn, 450
 Sundered from them by the great sink of Hell
 And sunless gulfs forlorn,
 Where who hath eyes, and who hath none
 Grope in one twilight over scraes and scars,
 And evil are the ways and dusky set the stars.

What man that holds life dear
 But bows the knee
 In worship, yea, and shuddering fear,
 Knowing that this must be?
 By mine own lips admonished and advised 460
 Of Power on Law's foundations laid,
 To me by olden Destiny demised,
 By Gods conveyed
 An absolute gift? I am the inheritress
 Of Time, and hold my fief since Time has been
 By very ancientry; not honoured less,
 Nor abject held and mean,
 Though deep in ever-during shade
 Under the sunny earth my mansion is,
 And the thick Dark of the unlamped Abyss. 470

Enter ATHENA

ATHENA

I heard a voice calling me when I chanced
 On far Scamander's side, to enfeoff me there
 In my new land, the which the kings and captains
 Achæan quartered me from their war-spoils,
 Mine in eternal seisin absolute,
 But set apart, a gift to Theseus' sons.
 Thence come I speeding not with way-worn foot,
 Or wing, but rapt on aegis rustling wide,
 My harnessed colts high-couraged and my car.
 And now this visitation, though I own 480
 No touch of fear, presents a wonder to me.
 In wonder's name who are ye? I say to all,
 And to yon alien seated at mine image,
 Your like I know not among things create,

Whether they be sights gazed on by the Gods
Or aught in the similitude of man.
But to revile deformity offends
Good neighbourhood and much revolts from justice.

CHORUS

Daughter of Zeus, I will in brief inform thee.
We are Night's children grey and grim and old;
In Hell, our home, called maledictions dire.

490

ATHENA

This tells your title and your lineage.

CHORUS

Thou art yet to know our state and our high charge.

ATHENA

Clearly expound and I shall quickly learn.

CHORUS

Man-slayers we drive forth from the homes of men.

ATHENA

Where is the bound set for the slayer's feet?

CHORUS

Where gladness is clean fallen out of fashion.

ATHENA

Is it in such wise ye beset yon man?

CHORUS

Yea; he 'sdeigned not to shed his mother's blood.

ATHENA

Under some strong constraint of menaced wrath?

500

CHORUS

Where is the goad compels to mother-murder?

ATHENA

There be twain here, and I have heard but one.

CHORUS

He is not to be bound, he will not take an oath.

ATHENA

Ye would seem just, yet work iniquity.

CHORUS

How? Tell me that! Thou art not poor in wisdom.

ATHENA

Wrong shall not triumph here by force of oaths.

CHORUS

Question him then and give a righteous judgment.

ATHENA

What? Would ye leave the issue in my hands?

CHORUS

Yea, for Thine own worth and Thy worshipful Sire.

ATHENA

Sir, what hast thou to answer touching this?
Tell me thy land, thy lineage and all
Thy griefs; and then speak in thine own defence,
If that thou look'st for judgment; for that cause
Harbourest at my hearth; all rites performed,
A grave appellant, like Ixion old.
Come, to all this make me your clear reply.

510

ORESTES

Sovran Athena, thou hast kept till last
 A grave misgiving I shall first dispel.
 I am no suppliant under ban; I come not
 To clasp Thine image with polluted hands. 520
 Proof mighty will I offer thereanent.
 By law the blood-stained murderer must be mute
 Till one with power to cleanse strike over him
 The sacrificial blood of sucking swine.
 Long since in homes not ours have we been purged
 With all due rites, dumb beast and running stream.
 Thus I resolve Thy doubt. By birth I am
 Argive; my sire—'tis well thou askest me—
 Was Agamemnon, Admiral of the sea,
 With whom thou didst dispeople Ilium, 530
 Yea, unstate Troy. Returned to his own house
 Foully he fell, by my black-hearted mother
 Cut down, ta'en, netted in the trammelling toils
 That bare grim witness of his bloody bath.
 I, then an exile, presently returned
 And killed my mother—I deny it not—
 In murderous revenge for my dear father.
 And Loxias with me is answerable,
 Who spake of torments dire to goad my heart,
 Except I dealt with them after their guilt. 540
 Judge Thou if I have justly done or no:
 What'er Thy doom, in Thee I rest content.

ATHENA

If any man think he can judge herein,
 'Tis much too weighty; neither were it lawful
 That I try murder, wreaked in bitter wrath.
 And, namely, when thou com'st a sacrosanct
 Suitor, aneled and hurtless to my house:
 Preferred withal as guiltless to my realm;
 While these hold powers not easily dismissed,
 And, if they triumph not in the event, 550
 Poison of hurt pride will fall presently
 And the land ail with age-long pestilence.
 So stands it; whether they stay or I bid them hence
 I shall find trouble and perplexity.

But, since so jump the business comes this way,
 I will appoint a court for murder sworn
 And make it a perpetual ordinance.
 Call up your witnesses, bring in your proofs,
 Justice' sworn helpers and oath-bounden aids.
 The prime in worth I'll choose from out my sons 560
 And come, and well and truly try the cause
 By the unswerving tenor of their troth.

[Exit.

CHORAL HYMN

Now comes the crack of doom, by strong
 Subversive stroke of rebel laws,
 If he have room to plead his wrong,
 And justice vindicate his cause,
 Whose hands are stained with his mother's blood.
 This knits all in one brotherhood,
 The easy fellowship of crime.
 And from this instance loom in long array 570
 Blood-boltered parents whom their sons shall slay
 Down the dark glimpses of disordered Time.
 And we that wont to watch mankind,
 That thirst for cups incarnadined,
 No more our anger shall unleash:
 I'll give Death leave to slay all flesh.
 And each shall prophesy his own
 Doom from his neighbour's fate foreknown;
 All comers then from the world's ends
 They shall accost in search of some relief; 580
 And learn from ashy lips and looks of grief
 Such feeble physic as despair commends.

Who reeleth then to the fatal blow
 Let him look not for redress,
 Nor bootless clamour 'Justice, Ho!
 Ho, the Throned Erinyes!'

Fathers, mothers, let your loud
 Death-wound shriek shrill through your halls;
 For a mightier frame is bowed;
 Yea, the House of Justice falls. 590

There is a place for Fear; she tries
The reins, a warder weariless;
And it is well with tears and sighs
To follow after Soothfastness.

What man, what power through the wide earth,
Whose soul is not with child of Fear
Nor tends her as a blessed birth,
Can be of Law true worshipper?

Let not thy heart commend
Life without Law, nor lend
Thy fulsome breath to fan a tyrant's lust;
God doth to power advance,
Though His wise governance
Change with the shifting forms of things, the comely Mean and
just. 600

Hark, how my graver rhyme
To that just Mean keeps time:
From Godlessness springs Pride, the Prodigal;
But he that doth possess
Soul's health hath Happiness,
The child of many prayers, the best beloved of all. 610

Lay to thy heart this law,
O Man; stand thou in awe
Of Justice' Altar; not for any lure
Or glitter of false gain
Plant there thy foot profane
To tread it in the dust, for chastisement is sure.

The deed is done, but thence
Ensues the consequence,
That crowns, completes, the master-stroke of all;
Honour, ye sons of men,
Your parents first, and then
The guest that goeth in and out, the stranger in your hall. 620

So, virtuous as I would have thee be,
Self-taught, by no compulsion overborne,

Thou canst not wholly miss Felicity,
Nor ever founder, utterly forlorn.
But this I say: who venturously puts forth
And every law of Righteousness outbraves,
His trash, his traffic, got 'neath evil stars,
In the dread Day of Wrath, 630
He shall commit to the devouring waves,
When splits the sail and splintered are the spars.

Then at deaf ears his cry unheard shall knock,
Swooning in gulfs where none to land may win;
Unearthly laughter shall his summons mock
Whose soul is fuel for the fires of Sin.
He boasted he would never see that day,
But now his Angel sees him weak and spent,
Powerless to top those seas; and, all his teen
And travail cast away, 640
On the uncharted reef of Justice rent,
He sinks with none to wail him and is no more seen.

SCENE. *The Areopagus.*

Enter ATHENA, preceded by a Herald.

ATHENA

Make proclamation, herald; keep the press back,
And let the braying trump Tyrrhenian
That 's heard in Heaven, filled with thy man's breath,
Sound in the public ear a mighty parle.
For while the synods fills my Judgment Hall
There must be silence; so shall the whole realm
Learn my commandments everlastingly,
And these, my chosen, that they judge aright. 650

Enter APOLLO.

CHORUS

Apollo! King! O'er what is Thine bear rule!
Say, wherefore art Thou come to meddle here?

APOLLO

First I am come to testify; for ye
Have here a suitor and a suppliant
Of mine; his blood-guilt I did purge and cleanse.
Next, I am in the bill, myself arraigned
For this man's mother's murder.

[*To ATHENA.*] Call the case;
And, as thou knowest how, maintain the Right.

ATHENA [*To the Furies*]

The word's with you; the trial may proceed;
And 'tis sound law and justice both, that he
Who doth prefer the charge shall first begin.

660

CHORUS

Though we be many, we shall use few words.
Do thou make answer as I question thee.
And tell us first if thou didst slay thy mother.

ORESTES

Yea, I make no denial; I killed her.

CHORUS

So, in this thrice encounter one round ends.

ORESTES

Ye have not thrown your man, ye crow too soon.

CHORUS

No matter; how was't thou didst take her life?

ORESTES

I answer—with my sword; I cut her throat.

CHORUS

By whom seduced? Whose ill admonishment?

670

ORESTES

At His behest: Himself is witness for me.

CHORUS

The Prophet bade thee murder thine own mother?

ORESTES

Even so; and to this hour I rue it not.

CHORUS

Not? But a pebble-cast may change thy tune.

ORESTES

I have my faith; my sire sends help from his grave.

CHORUS

What! Kill thy mother and put trust in ghosts!

ORESTES

She was aspersed with twofold villainy.

CHORUS

How can that be? I charge thee, tell the court.

ORESTES

She slew her husband and struck down my father.

CHORUS

Thou liv'st; but she is quit by her bloody death.

680

ORESTES

Why did ye not hunt her while yet she lived?

CHORUS

She was not of one blood with him she slew.

ORESTES

Am I accounted of my mother's blood?

CHORUS

Thou gory villain, was not thy body framed,
Fed in her womb? Wilt thou deny thy mother?

ORESTES

Do Thou bear witness for me now; pronounce,
Apollo, if I slew her with just cause;
For that 'twas done I have and do confess;
But whether justly done or no, do Thou
Give sentence, that the court may hear me plead. 690

APOLLO

To you, Athena's great Consistory,
Justly I'll speak, and, withal, truthfully,
For that I am a prophet and lie not.
My throne of Divination never yet
To man nor woman, no, nor polity,
Delivered aught, but I was bidden speak
By Zeus, the Father of the Olympian Gods.
Weigh well the force of that, ye Councillors,
And then ensue the thing my Father wills:
For Zeus is of more might than all oaths else. 700

CHORUS

Zeus, then, thou say'st, delivered the oracle
That bade Orestes venge his father's death
And reckon not the cost of a mother's life?

APOLLO

Far other was the murder of a man
Noble, by God-given sceptre high exalt,
At the hands of a woman, not with valiant
Arrows far sped by archer Amazon,
But in such wise as thou shalt hear, Pallas,
And you, upon whose vote the verdict hangs.

When from war's business prosperous in the main
He was returned, she gave him loving welcome.
He took his bath, and, when his bath was done,
She wrapped him in a cloak, a sleeveless robe,
And in its shackling mazes hewed him down
This was the manner of his taking off,
The majesty of the world, the lord of ships;
And such was she; oh, lay it to your hearts,
Ye judges, that are set to try the cause.

710

CHORUS

Zeus, thou pretendest, holds a father's life
Precious exceedingly; and yet Himself
Cast his own Father Cronos into chains!
Why, is not this confounding contraries?
Mark well his argument, I conjure you!

720

APOLLO

You worse than beasts! You hag-seed God-abhorred!
Bonds He may loose, for durance find a balm,
And work, howso He please, deliverance.
But when the dust hath drunk the blood of man
And he's once dead, there's no uprising; spell
For that my Father hath created not;
Though saving only this the frame of things
Is as a wheel He can revolve at will
And, nothing scant of breath, turn upside-down.

730

CHORUS

A sorry plea, look you, to save your man!
Shall he that spilt his mother's, his own, blood
Live there in Argos, in his father's house?
What public altars, think you, will he use?
Who will admit him to the Holy Stoup?

APOLLO

Listen, and thou shalt own my deeper lore.
To be called mother is no wise to be
Parent, but rather nurse of seed new-sown.

740

The male begets: she's host to her small guest;
 Preserves the plant, except it please God blight it.
 I'll furnish reasons for my argument.
 There hath been and there can be fatherhood
 Though there should be no mother; witness here
 Olympian Zeus' own self-created child,
 That grew not in the womb's dark coverture;
 A branch so goodly never Goddess bore.
 Pallas, as it hath ever been my care
 To make thy city great, famous thine arms, 750
 I have sent thee this sitter on thy hearth,
 That he may be Thy true man evermore,
 And Thou, Goddess, may'st count him Thine ally
 And all his seed; and to remotest age
 These men's sons' sons may keep Thy covenant.

ATHENA

Shall I direct them now to cast their votes,
 As conscience dictates? Hath enough been said?

CHORUS

We have shot every arrow from our bow;
 Nothing remains but to abide the event.

ATHENA

Surely. [*To APOLLO and ORESTES.*] And how shall I do right
 by you? 760

APOLLO

Ye have heard what ye have heard: think on your oaths;
 Carry to the urn the verdict of your hearts.

ATHENA

Ye men of Athens, hear my law; ye judges
 That try this cause, the first for man's blood shed.
 Henceforth to Aegus' congregated host
 This Court shall be an ordinance for ever;
 This Hill of Ares, once a place of arms
 Where leaguering Amazons pitched their tents, what time

They warred with Theseus and their jealous towers
 New-raised against our sovran citadel; 770
 And sacrificed to Ares, whence the Rock
 Is called the Rock Arcian. There shall Awe,
 With civil Fear, her kinsman, night and day
 Perpetual sessions hold to punish wrong,
 If that my sons depart not from my law.
 For, an thou foul the spring with flood or mire
 The fresh and sparkling cup thou'lt find no more.
 Nor anarchy nor arbitrary power
 Would I have Athens worship or uphold,
 Nor utterly banish Fear from civic life. 780
 For who is virtuous except he fear?
 This seat of Awe kept ever formidable
 Shall be a wall, a bulwark of salvation,
 Wide as your land, as your imperial state;
 None mightier in the habitable world
 From Scythia to the parts of the Peloponnese.
 A Place of Judgment incorruptible,
 Compassionate, yet quick in wrath, to wake
 And watch while Athens sleeps I stablish here.
 My large discourse these precepts would commend 790
 To my sons yet unborn. Rise from your seats;
 Take up your counters and upon your oaths
 Return a righteous verdict. I have done.

[The Judges cast their votes during the ensuing dialogue.]

CHORUS

Take heed, we are ungentle visitors;
 Learn of our wisdom and misprise us not.

APOLLO

My words that are God's Voice hold ye in awe;
 Make them not as blind plants that bear no fruit.

CHORUS

Thou hallowest deeds of blood that are not Thine,
 And shalt no more prophesy holy things.

APOLLO

Faileth the Father's Wisdom, for that He
Sheltered Ixion, the first murderer?

800

CHORUS

Thou sayest; but, if I am baulked of justice
I'll vex this land and visit it in wrath.

APOLLO

The younger Gods regard thee not; the old
Pay thee no honour; victory is mine.

CHORUS

So didst thou sometime deal in Pheres' house;
Tempting the Fates to make mankind immortal.

APOLLO

Is it not just to help a worshipper,
And doubly, trebly just in the day of need?

CHORUS

Thou didst break down earth's parcelled governance,
With new wine practise on the Goddesses old.

810

APOLLO

Nay, when the cause is lost, thy venom void;
It hath no power to hurt thine adversaries.

CHORUS

Since Thy hot youth o'er-rides our ancients
I wait on judgment; doubtful yet to launch
My indignation 'gainst the State of Athens.

ATHENA

It shall be mine, if judgment hang in poise,
To cast this counter that Orestes live.
Mother is none that gave my Godhead life;

I am the male's; saving my never-wed
Virginity, my Father's child thrice o'er. 820
Therefore I rate not high a woman's death
That slew her lord, the master of her house.
Orestes wins, yea, though the votes be paired.
Come, Sirs, dispatch; ye whose the office is
To make an end, empty me out the urns.

ORESTES

Phoebus Apollo, how will judgment go?

CHORUS

Swarth Night, my Mother, watchest Thou unseen?

ORESTES

I near mine end, the halter or the day!

CHORUS

We fall, or have great glory evermore! 830

APOLLO

Sirs, count the votes; make strictest scrutiny,
With holy fear, lest Judgment go awry.
A vote o'erlooked may work most grievous wrong:
A single pebble save a tottering house.

[*A pause.*]

ATHENA

The accused is found 'not guilty' of the charge;
The tellers certify an equal count.

ORESTES

O Pallas! O Preserver of my race!
To my lost realm my father once possessed
Thou hast restored me! Now shall all Greece say,
'True Son of Argos, lord of his father's substance, 840
He dwelleth with his own.' Pallas wrought this
And Loxias and the Almighty Third,

The Saviour. Moved by my sire's fate, He saw,
 And saved from them that pled my mother's cause.
 Now e'er I go to mine own house I swear
 Unto Thy land and all Thy host an oath
 Succeeding ages shall fulfil: no prince
 Of earth shall carry here the barbèd spear.
 When we are in our graves we will confound
 Who break this oath with sorry misadventure;
 Their ways be weariness, their paths forbid,
 And for their rapine they shall reap but ruth.
 But if they shall keep faith, gird them with might
 For Pallas' city, we will show them grace.
 Goddess, farewell; be matchless still in arms,
 Find still a valiant people strong to throw
 All who rise up against Thee; keep Thee safe
 And with their sword win for Thee victory!

850

[Exit.

CHORUS

Oh, ye young Gods! Ye have ridden the old laws down, ye
 have reft
 My prey, and I am left
 Dishonoured and undone!
 But for these pangs
 Athens shall have my malison!
 Ay, on these lips there hangs
 (Ho, Vengeance, soon to shed)
 A venomèd drop of my heart's agony!
 And it shall multiply and spread,
 Bitter and barren! It shall be
 A mildew and a leprosy,
 A canker to the leafless tree,
 A curse to the childless bed;
 On everything that hath breath
 Corrosion, purulence, and death!
 Wail—and wail—and wail?
 Or witch them? shadowing their land with bale?
 Transmute to unimaginable woe
 Grief insupportable? Oho,
 Ye Virgin Daughters to black Midnight born,
 How sharp your sorrow! How is your honour shorn!

860

870

ATHENA

Nay, take it not with such a heavy heart; 880
 Ye are not vanquished; equal are the votes
 In simple truth, not thy disparagement.
 Oh, here were proofs radiant with God's own light!
 And He that gave the oracle bare witness
 Orestes should not suffer for his deed.
 Let not your heavy wrath light on this ground;
 Consider, be not angry, shed no drops
 To blast the fruitful earth with barrenness
 And with keen tooth devour the pregnant seed.
 I will provide you, pledge hereto my oath, 890
 A hold, a hollow in this righteous land,
 Altars and shining thrones where ye shall sit,
 And worship and great honour from her sons.

CHORUS

Oh, ye young Gods! Ye have ridden the old laws down, ye
 have reft
 My prey, and I am left
 Dishonoured and undone!
 But for these pangs
 Athens shall have my malison!
 Ay, on these lips there hangs
 (Ho, Vengeance, soon to shed) 900
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 A canker to the leafless tree,
 A curse to the childless bed;
 On everything that hath breath
 Corrosion, purulence, and death!
 Wail—and wail—and wail?
 Of witch them? shadowing their land with bale? 910
 Transmute to unimaginable woe
 Grief insupportable? Oho,
 Ye Virgin Daughters to black Midnight born,
 How sharp your sorrow! How is your honour shorn!

ATHENA

Your honour is safe; are ye not Goddesses?
Curse not this soil that giveth life to man.
I too have faith in Zeus; but why waste words?
I only know the keys of the arsenal
Of Heaven, stored with the sealed thunderbolt.
But we shall need no thunder. Listen to me:
Vent no wild words in sour despite, to make
All that yields increase utterly miscarry.
This dark wave's bitter fury put to sleep.
Be what ye are, majestic, denizens
With me in this fair land; prime offerings
Shall then be yours through all her borders wide
For children and the sacred marriage rite
For evermore, and ye shall bless my words.

920

CHORUS

Oho! Am I to take these buffets—I
To have my elder wisdom scoffed at—be
Bid to my place—to house with infamy
Here on this plot, this patch, this ell of earth?
Blast it, my fury! Pain—pain—pain—
Here at my heart—whence comes it? Why
Am I to suffer? Darkness, Death, and Dearth!
Night, Mother Night, shall my wroth heart be hot
And wilt thou hearken not?
Strong craft of subtle Gods hath reft my ancient majesty!

930

ATHENA

I will be patient with thy passioning;
Thou art mine elder, wiser than than I.
Yet Zeus hath not denied me understanding.
Find out a new race, other soil; yet here
Your heart will be; I speak this for your warning.
The tide of Time shall for my people roll
With ever-mantling glory: thou shalt have
Thy mansion here hard by Erectheus' house,
And men and women come with frequent pomp
And greater laud than the wide world can give.
But in my borders bring no grindery

940

To whet sharp daggers, in the breast of Youth
Bloody and dangerous; with more madness edged
Than works with wicked ferment in new wine.
Nor take, as 'twere, the gamecock's heart, to plant
Domestic Havoc here that fights with kind.
Without their gates let my sons go to war,
And who loves honour shall have all he craves.
Your bantam-bully, ruffler of the yard,
Arrides me not, and I will none of him.
Take thou thy choice and take it from my hand;
Fair service, fair content, fair recompense,
A portion in this realm the Gods love most.

CHORUS

Oho! am I to take these buffets—I
To have mine elder wisdom scoffed at—be
Bid to my place—to house with infamy
Here on this plot, this patch, this ell of earth!
Blast it, my fury! Pain—pain—pain,
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Am I to suffer? Darkness, Death, and Dearth!
Night, Mother Night, shall my wroth heart be hot
And wilt thou hearken not?
Strong craft of subtle gods hath reft my ancient majesty.

ATHENA

Still will I bless, thou shalt not weary me,
Nor say my nonage set thy years at nought,
Nor churlish men scorned thy Divinity
And drave thee from their gates discomfited.
If thou hold sacred the sweet soul of Reason,
If there be any virtue, any balm,
Upon these lips, thou wilt remain. If not,
Though thou should'st cast all anger in the scale
To sink the land, all malice, all despite,
It is not justly done. Justice gives thee
A realm to share, a rich inheritance,
And nothing of thine honour takes away.

CHORUS

Athena Queen, what mansion wilt Thou give me?

ATHENA

One where Grief cometh not; accept it thou.

CHORUS

An if I do, what honour shall I have?

ATHENA

This, that no home shall prosper without thee.

CHORUS

But hast Thou power to make thy promise good?

ATHENA

We will establish him that worships thee.

CHORUS

Wilt Thou assure me this for evermore?

990

ATHENA

I promise not except I can perform.

CHORUS

Methinks, Thy magic works; I am no more wroth.

ATHENA

Possess the land and thou shalt win its love.

CHORUS

What shall I sing that hath a blessing in it?

ATHENA

A song to celebrate a cause well won.
From the sweet earth, from the sea-dews and damp,
From skies and winds ask inspirations, airs
That travel on over a sunlit land;

Fruit from the ground, and increase of strong cattle
 For all my sons, that Time can never tire;
 And saving Health for seed of human kind.
 Natheless, on Virtue chiefly shed thy balm;
 Like a wise gardener of the Soul, I hold
 There is no graft nor bud blooms half so fair;
 And this is thine; but thou shalt leave to me
 Glory of battle, where the cause is just,
 Death, but Death garlanded with victory;
 And grudge if I be found herein remiss.

1000

CHORUS

Pallas' home contenteth me;
 Honour to the strong citie
 Zeus Almighty made His own
 And Ares' armèd strength sustains;
 A fortress for the Gods of Greece,
 A jewel flashing forth anew,
 When ravished were her costly fanes
 And her high altars overthrown.
 Breathe on her blessings, breathe the dew
 Of prayer; Earth, yield her thine increase;
 Shine, thou rejoicing Sun, and speed
 All nature sends and mortals need!

1010

1020

ATHENA

Not that I cherish Athens less,
 But that I love her well, have I
 Throned in her midst Great Goddesses,
 Spirits hard to pacify.
 All that makes up Man's moving story
 Is theirs to govern and dispense;
 He whom their hard hand ne'er made sorry,
 Who hath not met them on his way,
 Walking in blindness knows not whence
 The shock that beats him to his knees.
 The sin of some forgotten day
 Delivers up his soul to these.
 Destruction, like a voiceless ghost,
 Silenceth all his empty boast
 And minisheth his glory.

1030

CHORUS

I will have nor storm nor flood
 Scathe her vines and olive-bowers;
 No scorching wind shall blind the bud
 In the waking-time of flowers.
 By my grace all airs that blow 1040
 Their appointed bounds shall know.
 No distemper blast her clime
 With perpetual barrenness;
 Flocks and herds in yeaning time
 Pan shall with twin offspring bless;
 And Earth's wombèd wealth, God-sealed,
 All its lucky ingots yield.

ATHENA

Warders of Athens, have ye heard
 Her voice? Know ye what these things mean?
 Wist ye how mighty is the word 1050
 Erinys spake, the Queen?
 Mighty 'mid deathless Gods her crying,
 'Mid Powers that Hell's hid glooms invest,
 And in this world of living, dying
 Mighty and manifest!
 She biddeth one make melody,
 And one down dark ways leadeth She,
 Blinded with tears undrying.

CHORUS

Untoward and untimely Doom
 Bring not strong Youth to his death-bed: 1060
 Ye maidens, in your beauty bloom,
 Live not unloved, nor die unwed.
 You Heavenly Pair, this good gift grant.
 Grant it, ye Elder Destinies,
 Our Sisters, whom one Mother bare,
 Spirits whose governance is law,
 Of every home participant,
 And at all seasons, foul or fair,
 Just Inmates, Righteous Presences,
 Shadows of an Unseen Awe; 1070
 Over the wide earth and the deep seas
 Honoured above all Deities.

ATHENA

Oh, bounty dealt with loving hand!
It needs must fill my heart with glee,
Such largesse lavished on my land.
Wise Spirit, thanks to thee,
Spirit of Counsel, suave and holy,
Whose sober eye could lead me on
Till, though the stubborn will yield slowly,
Yet their wild hearts were won!
But Zeus, the Lord of Civic Life,
Gave victory; in this noble strife
He made Good triumph solely.

1080

CHORUS

Tiger-throated Faction fed
On the meat of human woe,
Filled but never surfeited,
Come not hither growling low,
Nor wake Athens with thy roar.
Never be this thirsty ground
Drunk with fratricidal blood,
Nor lust of Power insatiate
Snatch at vengeance evermore.
In one fellowship of Good
Each be to his neighbour bound,
One in love and one in hate;
For such grace, where'er 'tis found,
Lays the balm to many a wound.

1090

ATHENA

Are they not wise? Speaks she not fair?
Her tongue of gold makes counsel sweet
And points the happy highway where
Soft words and Wisdom meet.
Mine eyes see visions; fair foundations
Rise round these forms with fury fraught!
Serve them! Bring them your rich oblations,
And ye serve not for nought.
Bless them, and they will surely bless;
At home the reign of Righteousness,
Renown throughout all nations.

1100

CHORUS

Joy to you, joy and all good things!
Joy to the fortunate city that lies
With Zeus about her and above;
Vowed to the Unmarried Maiden's love
And in the dawn of Time made wise,
Whom Pallas covers with her wings
And the Father sanctifies!

1110

ATHENA

Joy to you too in amplest store!
But it is time; I go before;
I lead you on your road;
And by your escort's holy light
Conduct you through the Shades of Night
Down to your dark Abode.
Set forward then your priestly train;
Speed them with blood of victims slain
Under this holy ground;
Bind whatsoever bringeth death,
And whatsoever profiteth
Be by your spell unbound.
As ye help Athens by your charms
She shall be great in arts and arms,
Still, still with victory crowned!
Lead on, ye sons of Cranaus;
For those that make their home with us
A path and passage find;
And by their good gifts freely given,
By these sweet charities of Heaven
Be all men of one mind!

1120

1130

CHORUS

Joy, joy to Athens! Oh, twice blest
Be all that in her borders dwell,
Or be they men of mortal mould
Or deathless Deities that hold
Pallas' rock-built citadel!
Love me that am your Sacred Guest
And bid to Grief a long farewell!

1140

ATHENA

Take all my thanks; my heart goes with your prayers.
Myself will lead you by the torches' blaze
Down to your habitation 'neath the earth
With these my ministrants round my Statua
On duteous watch; the apple of the eye
Of Theseus' land, a famous company
Of little ones and wives and beldames old.
We 'll mantle them in cloaks of scarlet fine
And all about them shake the bright fireshine,
Give these New Dwellers noble welcoming
That goodly men from their goodwill may spring.

1150

ESCORT

Pass on your way, ye mighty,
Ye Jealous in honour pass on,
Children of Night unbegotten,
Seed of her womb unsown,
With pomp and triumph and holy mirth
(Hush! Good words, all ye people!),
And prayer and sacrifice descend
Down to the dark, diluvial earth.
(Hush! Good words all ye people!)
Come, ye Majestic Spirits, come,
Bring good luck to your new-found home
By the glad bright light of the burning brand!
(Cry, cry aloud with jubilee!)
Peace to thee and peace to thee
And peace for ever in Pallas' land!
Partnered with happy Destiny
All-seeing Zeus hath wrought to this end!
(Cry, cry aloud with jubilee!)

1160

1170

[*Exeunt.*]

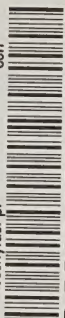




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